NATION

'Aim for 4 children, get Rs 1 lakh'

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BUSINESS

Sensex nosedives over 1,048 points, Nifty below 23K

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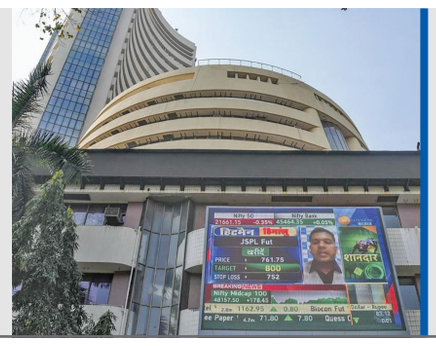

SPORTS

India Open: Consistent Satwik & Chirag aim to win

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SALAR

DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

ساڈھ روزنامہ بنگلور

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In 2yr low, Rupee dives 66P to close at 86.12/USD

MUMBAI, 13 JAN

The rupee logged its steepest single-day fall in nearly two years and ended the session 66 paise down at its historic low of 86.70 against the US dollar on Monday, weighed down by a stronger American curren-cy and surging crude oil prices.

At the interbank foreign exchange, the rupee opened at 86.12, and moved 1 paisa during intraday to 86.11 before closing the session with a loss of a staggering 66 paise at its lowest-ever level of 86.70 against the greenback.

The fall of 66 paise in one session was the steepest since February 6, 2023 when the unit had lost 68 paise.

Currency has plummeted more than Re 1 from the December 30 closing level of 85.52.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) have notably contributed to the rupee's depreciation, offloading eq-uities worth Rs 2,254.68 crore on Friday alone, with total withdrawals reaching Rs 22,194 crore this month, according to exchange data.

Analysts suggest that the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has permitted the rupee's decline amidst dwindling foreign exchange reserves and a challenging global economic landscape. RBI's reserves reportedly fell by USD 5.693 billion to USD 634.585 billion for the week ending 3 January. The dollar's strength is further bolstered by strong US job growth, increasing benchmark treasury yields, and rising Brent crude prices nearing USD 81 per barrel, driven by recent sanctions on Russia. Anuj Choudhary, Research Analyst at Mirae Asset Sharekhan, indicated that the rupee is likely to remain under pressure due to the elevated crude prices and ongoing risk aversion in global markets, projecting the USD-INR trading range between Rs 86.25 and Rs 86.80. In domestic equity markets, the Sensex plummeted by 1,048.90 points to 76,330.01, while the Nifty fell by 345.55 points to 23,085.95. Despite these challenges, India's retail inflation eased to 5.22 per cent in December, and industrial production grew by 5.2 per cent in November. —*PTI*

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Retail inflation eases to 4-month low of 5.2% in Dec

NEW DELHI, 13 JAN

Retail inflation declined to a four-month low of 5.22 per cent in December, mainly on ac-count of easing of prices in the food basket, including vegetables -- according to govern-ment data released on Monday - giving headroom to the Reserve Bank to reduce the key interest rate in upcom-ing monetary policy reviews. The inflation-based on the Consumer Price Index (CPI) eased for the second month in a row after it breached the Reserve Bank of India's (RBI's) upper tolerance level of 6 per cent in October. The annual rate of inflation was 5.48 per cent in November and 5.69 per cent in the year-ago period. —*PTI*

Man arrested for severing udders of 3 cows in B'luru

BENGALURU, 13 JAN

The Cottonpet police in Bengaluru on Monday arrested a man for severing the udders of three cows, po-lice said. Police identi-fied the accused as Sheikh Nasir, 30, from Bihar's Champaran. He had cut the udders of the cows in Vinayakanagar of Chamarajpet in the wee hours of Sunday, police sources said. An FIR was registered under the Cruelly to Animals Act and Sec 325 of BNS. "Nasir did this act after being drunk. He works as a helper in a plastic and cloth bag stitching shop 50m away from the place of incident," a cop said. Nasru has been arrested and remanded to custody till 24 January.—*Salar News*

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BBMP Chief orders FIRs against illegal flex banners

BENGALURU, 13 JAN

Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP) Chief Commissioner Tushar Girinath has directed officials to file FIRs against those responsible for installing unauthorised advertisements across the city. During a meeting at the BBMP head office, Girinath emphasised strict action to tackle unau-thorised flex banners across all eight zones of Bengaluru. He instructed officials to identify and remove such banners and take legal action against violators. Despite a 2024 BBMP drive that removed thousands of banners, many, including political ones, continue to be installed illegally, violating a 2018 Karnataka High Court order. Additionally, Girinath instructed officials to identify properties exempt from property tax and ensure they are included in the revenue system.— *Salar News*

Modi inaugurates Z-Morh tunnel, Omar lauds PM

SRINAGAR, 13 JAN

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday inaugurated the strategically important Z-Morh tunnel in the Sonamarg area of Jammu and Kashmir which will make the tourist resort accessible round the year. Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Omar Abdullah heaped praise on Modi for making strides in bringing Delhi and Kashmir closer, not just in miles, but in minds. The unexpected yet unsurprising praise on Monday came just days after Abdullah, leader of the National Conference, which is an INDIA bloc member, called for the grouping to be disbanded. —*PTI*

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Maha Kumbh begins with 1.5cr taking dip at Sangam

In 45 days, more than 40 crore are expected to participate

MAHAKUMBH NAGAR, 13 JAN

The Maha Kumbh, the world's largest religious gathering, began on Monday with 1.5 crore devotees taking a dip in the sacred confluence of the Ganga, Yamuna, and the mythical Saraswati at Prayagraj. Amid thick fog, intense cold, and freezing waters, pilgrims gathered for this momentous occasion, believing that a dip at the Sangam would cleanse their sins and grant them 'moksha'.

The event, held once every 12 years, is even more auspicious this time as seers claim it coincides with celestial permutations that occur once in 144 years. Over the next 45 days, more than 40 crore people, including international visitors, are expected to participate.

Devotees from across India and the world, including Brazil, Spain, and the US, gathered in anticipation of the event.

Former US Army soldier-turned-ascetic Michael, now known as 'Baba Mokshapuri', shared his transformative journey, emphasising the profound spiritual significance of the gathering.

A devotee from Brazil, practicing yoga, called it a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to attain 'moksha', while Julie from Spain expressed her joy at bathing in the sacred waters. Thirteen Akharas of seers from different sects participated in the Maha Kumbh, adding to the event's religious importance. Devotees, chanting sacred slogans such as "Jai Ganga Maiyya" and "Har Har Ma-hadev", made their way to the ghats before dawn to partake in the ritual. —*PTI*

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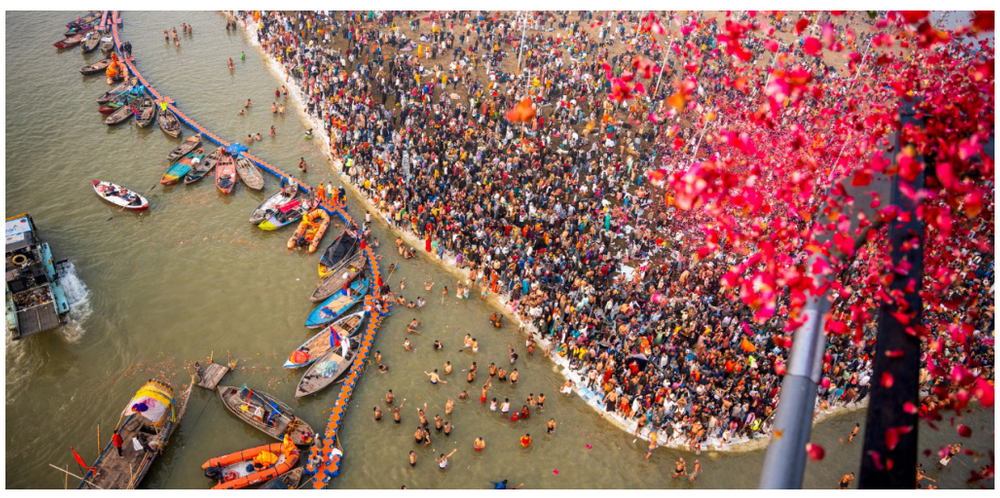

Rose petals being showered on devotees as they take a holy dip at Sangam ***PHOTO: PTI***

TAX DEVOLUTION

Centre betrayed K'taka with meagre ₹6,3310 cr funds: CM

BENGALURU, 13 JAN

Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah has accused the BJP-led central government of betraying the state by allocat-ing a mere Rs 6,310 crore from a total of Rs 1,73,030 crore meant for all states. He ex-pressed dis-appointment with Karnataka BJP leaders for their silence in the face of what he termed a 'be-trayal', questioning their commitment to the people of Karnataka.

Siddaramaiah highlighted that Karnataka, despite consti-tuting only 5 per cent of India's population, con-tributes 8.4 per cent to the national GDP and ranks second in GST collection. He lamented that while the Union Budget has nearly dou-bled since 2018-19, Karnataka's share has stagnated, with allo-cations drop-ping from Rs 46,288 crore in 2018-19 to Rs 44,485 crore in 2024-25, includ-ing grants. The Chief Minister argued that Karnataka should be receiving at least Rs one lakh crore annually, calling the cur-rent allocation "a shocking drop" and an injustice to the hardworking citizens of the state. He noted that other states, such as Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, were receiving signifi-cantly larger allocations despite their governance issues.

Siddaramaiah ***PHOTO: PTI***

Siddaramaiah also drew attention to the 15th Finance Commission's reduction of Karnataka's tax share from 4.713 per cent to 3.64 per cent, which has cost the state an esti-mated Rs 79,770 crore over five years. He urged every Kannadiga to unite against this perceived discrimination and demand their rightful share of resources, stating, "Our Tax, Our Right". —*PTI*

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Border fencing: India summons B'desh envoy

NEW DELHI, 13 JAN

India has reaffirmed to Bangladesh's Acting High Commissioner, Md Nural Islam, that it complies with all protocols and agreements regarding border security, including fencing measures. The Ministry of Exter-nal Affairs (MEA) summoned Islam to the South Block on Monday to discuss these concerns.

In its formal communication, India reiterated its commitment to a "crime-free border" and stated its efforts to tackle issues such as cross-border criminal activities, smuggling, and human trafficking.

The MEA highlighted that measures such as barbed wire fencing, border lighting, and the installation of tech-nical devices are integral to securing the border.

The statement further emphasised the expectation that Bangladesh will uphold prior agreements aimed at collaboratively addressing cross-border crimes. "India conveyed its expectation that all earlier under-standings will be implemented by Bangladesh and that there will be a cooperative approach to com-bating cross-border crimes," the MEA remarked. This diplomatic move follows a summons issued to India's High Commissioner in Dhaka, Pranay Verma, by the Bangladeshi Foreign Ministry, which expressed "deep concern" over recent fencing activities by India along the Indo-Bangladesh border. —*PTI*

HAPPY MAKAR SANKRANTI

Students of Mount Darevel Pre-Primary School celebrated Makar Sankranti at Vijayanagar in Bengaluru on Monday. The harvest festival will be celebrated across the nation on 14 January ***PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD***

'SPREADING MISINFORMATION'

Vaishnaw fact-checks Zuckerberg on Lok Sabha poll results

NEW DELHI, 13 JAN

Union Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw countered Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg on Monday on his claim that after the Covid-19 pandemic, most incumbent governments, including the one in India, lost elec-tions in 2024, asserting that his statement was "factu-ally incorrect".

Vaishnaw on X said as the world's largest democracy, India conducted the 2024 gen-eral election involving more than 64 crore vot-ers. "People of India reaffirmed their trust in NDA led by PM Narendra Modi ji's leadership. Zuckerberg had reportedly claimed in a pod-cast that in elections around t h e world in 2024, most incumbent governments, including the one in India, lost power. "From free food for 800 million, 2.2 billion free vac-cines, and aid to nations world-wide during Covid, to leading India as the fastest-growing major economy, PM Modi's decisive 3rd-term victory is a testament to good governance and public trust," Vaishnaw asserted.

Tagging Meta, he said it is "disappointing" to see misin-formation from Zuckerberg himself. "Let's uphold facts and credibility," Vaishnaw said. —*PTI*

India gets to send 1.75L devotees to Hajj this year

NEW DELHI, 13 JAN

India has formalised its quota of pilgrims for the Hajj in 2025 through a recent agreement with Saudi Ara-bia, setting the number at 1,75,025. The agreement was signed by Kiren Rijiju, Minister of Minority Affairs, and Saudi Arabia's Minister for Hajj and Umrah, Tawfiq Bin Fawzan Al-Rabiah, in Jeddah.

Rijiju expressed the gov-ernment's commitment to pro-viding optimal services for Indian Hajj pilgrims. During the meeting, both ministers discussed significant aspects related to the upcoming pil-grimage and explored avenues to enhance the overall experi-ence for pilgrims from India, which is expected to strength-en bilateral relations between the two nations. In a recent query response in the Rajya Sabha, Rijiju detailed that the quota for Hajj 2025 is to be distrib-ut-ed between the Hajj Committee of India (HCoI) and Hajj Group Organisers (HGOs) in a 70:30 ratio, as per the Haj Policy 2025 issued on 5 August 2024. Of the total quota, 52,507 pilgrims are allocated to HGOs, with the distribution in the past five years having fluctuated between 70:30 and 80:20. —*PTI*

Jayalalithaa's assets: K'taka HC bins heirs' plea

BENGALURU, 13 JAN

Karnataka High Court has dismissed on Monday an appeal by J Deepak and J Deepa, the legal heirs of late Tamil Nadu chief minister J Jayalalithaa, seeking the release of her assets con-fiscated in a 2004 dis-pro-portionate assets case.

Jayalalithaa was con-victed by a special court in 2014 for amassing wealth disproportionate to her known sources of income during her ten-ure from 1991 to 1996. Following her convic-tion, her properties were confiscated by the authorities.

Although she was acquitted by the Karnataka High Court in 2015, then Congress gov-ernment in Karna-taka appealed against it in Supreme Court. Case against Jayalalithaa was abated due to her demise in 2016. While convicting her close aide VK Sasikala, and her two relatives VN Sudhakaran and Elavarasi in 2017, Supreme Court upheld the confiscation of Jayalalithaa's assets.

Deepak and Deepa, rec-ognized as Jayalalithaa's legal heirs by the Madras High Court in 2020, filed an appeal seeking the release of her confiscat-ed assets, arguing that since the proceedings against her were terminated upon her death, she should not be considered a convict, and her properties should be re-stored to them. —*PTI*

Four injured in Bengaluru cylinder blast

BENGALURU, 13 JAN

Four people were injured when a cooking gas cylinder exploded at a house Chokkasandra in the state capital on Monday, police said. The blast occurred around 8.30am. The house was occupied by a couple – Biju Das and his wife Anjali Das. Both of them and two neighbours were injured in this incident. A girl named Manjushree, who was also in the house when the cylinder exploded, miraculously survived with minor injuries, sources said.—*PTI*

Belagavi man killed in drunken brawl inside bar

BELAGAVI, 13 JAN

A man was killed after a heated argument between three drunken men turned violent in a bar and restaurant in Mudalagi town of Belagavi district. Rangappa Patil and Irappa Tungal were having drinks when they picked up an argument with 45-year-old Lakshman Maranur at the next table. The argument turned violent and Rangappa and Irappa attacked Lakshman. When they found that Lakshman died in the attack, the duo dumped his body outside the bar. Police have arrested Rangappa and Irappa. —*Salar News*

Cow injured after eating bomb in Shivanasamudra

MYSURU, 13 JAN

– A cow was severely injured after consuming a country bomb, allegedly placed by poachers to hunt wild boars, in a maize field at Shivanasamudra, Chamarajanagar district, on Sunday. The bomb exploded, causing severe injuries to the cow's mouth. The cow's owner, Shivu, filed a complaint with the forest department and Satyagala Police, urging them to investigate poaching activities in the area. Police officials confirmed that poachers use bombs coated with corn flour to attract and harm wild animals. Meanwhile, the Satyagala Police have registered a case and are investigating the incident. In a separate incident, Begur Police arrested two individuals, Ubed and Siraj, for illegally transporting cattle to slaughterhouses. Five cattle and a calf were rescued during the operation. —*Salar News*

BSP flays BJP's Bheema Sammelana plans

MYSURU, 13 JAN

State Bahujan Samaj Party President M Krishnamurthy on Monday criticised the BJP's decision to organise Bheema Sammelana to woo Dalits after its leader and Union Home Minister Amith Shah insulted Dr BR Ambedkar in the Parliament. He also slammed BJP leaders such as Govind Karjola, Chalavadi Narayanaswamy and N Mahesh for their silence over Shah's remarks. BJP's Dalit leaders have no moral right to organise the Bheema Sammelana, Krishnamurthy said, adding that the Dalit community should reject such leaders. —*Salar News*

No divide in State Cong: Surjewala downplays tussle

He says media is questioning united govt but not fractured BJP

BENGALURU, 13 JAN

Downplaying allegations of a power tussle within the ruling Congress amid speculations of a change of guard in the State, AICC General Secretary In-Charge of Karnataka Randeep Singh Surjewala on Monday said the party's government was united and it was the BJP which is fractured.

Claiming that there were differences within the BJP and its alliance with the JD(S), Surjewala tried to portray the alleged political power struggle within the Congress as a media creation.

"Instead of questioning a fractured BJP, which is tearing itself apart, a select group of news channels are questioning a united government that is solidly executing a direct benefit transfer to every Kannadiga family, with a cumulative total of Rs 58,000 crore," Surjewala said.

Congress leader Randeep Singh Surjewal, CM Siddaramaiah & DyCM DK Shivakumar in Bengaluru on Monday **PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD**

The Congress government's guarantee scheme is the biggest welfare initiative in India. Naturally, the BJP is perturbed by it, Surjewala said. He highlighted the differences within the saffron party in the state and claimed that the BJP and its alliance partner JD(S) are engaged in a "fratricidal war".

"To hide their misdeeds and failures, the opposition continues to fabricate stories to attack the Congress and its guarantees. They are not merely targeting Siddaramaiah, DK Shivakumar or the Congress government. They are attacking the people of Karnataka. We will counter every such move by the BJP and JD(S) against the Congress guarantees and the people of Karnataka," Surjewala said.

Surjewala's comments came a day after Chief Minister Siddaramaiah stated that his chair was not vacant.

"There is no confusion among us. The media repeatedly reports that the CM will be changed, even though the chair is not vacant. It is speculated and reported as a political discussion if we meet over food. Sometimes, even dialogues are fabricated about what we might have discussed, based purely on speculation," the CM had said. —*PTI*

PROTEST AGAINST CENTRE

Police arrest farmers for burning PM's effigy in Mysuru

MYSURU, 13 JAN

Mysuru city police on Monday arrested farmers who held a protest under the leadership of Kurubur Shanthakumar, the South Indian states convenor of the Samyukta Kisan Morcha (Non-Political), when they burnt the effigies of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union Agriculture Minister Shivaraj Singh Chovan. They were later released.

The farmers had organised protests in all the taluk headquarters against the Union Government's alleged negligence towards Samyukta Kisan Morcha (Non-Political) National Convener Jagjit Singh Dalaiwala's hunger strike. The Punjab farmer leader has been on an indefinite strike in Kanuri- Shambu border of Delhi for the past 49 days.

Shanthkumar condemned the Union government for using police to suppress the farmers' agitation and not introducing Minimum Support Price (MSP) for farm produce. The Union government led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi dilly-dallying on the implementation of MSP on farm produce despite recommendations in this regard by a 31-member Parliamentary Board on 18 November and a Supreme Court-constituted committee under High Court Justice Nawab Singh on 22 November, Shanthkumar said. The agitating farmers also condemned the BJP and other political parties for branding farmers as Naxalites. A committee headed by Modi, when he was Gujarat chief minister, in 2011 had supported MSP with the backing of law. He became PM with the promise of implementing the recommendations of MS Swamthinathan Commission on farmers in 2014. However, despite becoming the PM for a third time, he is turning blind eye to farmers' plights, he said. —*Salar News*

Deduct mediclaim from accident aid relief: HC

BENGALURU, 13 JAN

The High Court of Karnataka has said that compensation awarded for medical expenses and hospitalisation under the Motor Vehicles (MV) Act must account for amounts received through insurance policies.

Justice Hanchate Sanjeevkumar made the ruling while directing an insurance company to compensate the family of S Hanumanthappa with Rs 4,93,839 along with six per cent annual interest.

The court ordered the deduction of Rs 1.8 lakh previously reimbursed through a mediclaim policy.

Hanumanthappa, a resident of Marathahalli, met with an accident on 10 December, 2008, while going to Seva Mandir village from Lepakshi. An autorickshaw hit his motorcycle, causing severe injuries to

PHOTO: X

Hanumanthappa and his wife.

Following the incident, a case was registered by the Hindupur Rural Police. Hanumanthappa approached the Motor Accident Claims Tribunal in Bengaluru, which awarded Rs 6,73,839 in compensation on 22 March, 2013. This included Rs 5,24,639 for medical expenses.Challenging the award, the insurance company argued that the reimbursement of Rs 1.8 lakh under a mediclaim policy should be deducted from the compensation amount granted under the medical expenses category. —*PTI*

HEBBALKAR ABUSE CASE

Horatti backs Ravi over CID probe

BENGALURU, 13 JAN

Karnataka Legislative Council Chairperson Basavaraja S Horatti has opposed the CID probing the allegations of BJP MLC CT Ravi using foul words against minister Laxmi Hebbalkar inside the Legislative Council at Suvarna Vidhana Soudha in Belagavi on 19 December.

In a letter to Home Minister G Parameshwara on 10 January, Horatti underlined that he has already given his verdict on the episode, which is final. The letter was shared with the media on Sunday.

"The chair has already given its verdict after reviewing the Constitution of India, the Rules of Procedure and Conduct of the Karnataka Legislative

CT Ravi **PHOTO: ANI**

Basavaraja S Horatti **PHOTO: X**

Council, the Rules of Procedure and Conduct of the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha, Kaul and Shakter's Practice and Procedure of Parliament and Subhash Kashyap's Balimantori Procedures regarding the incident that took place in the Legislative Council of the Suvarna Vidhana Soudha, Belgaum on 19.12.2024," Horatti said.

"The chairperson, being a constitutional post, has the sovereign power over the parliamentary system and process, and the House has the power to punish its members for disorderly conduct or other abuses in the House while it is in session," the LC chief said.

Accordingly, the chairperson has the power to maintain the traditions that have been followed so far and to control the proceedings within the premises of the House, and his decision is final, Horatti added. —*PTI*

KMF & CHAI POINT EYE WORLD RECORD AT KUMBH

BENGALURU, 13 JAN

The Karnataka Milk Federation (KMF), which markets its dairy products under the Nandini brand, on Monday said it has partnered with the tea café chain Chai Point for the Maha Kumbh Mela at Prayagraj.

As part of this collaboration, Chai Point has established 10 stores within the Maha Kumbh Mela premises, and these stores are poised to serve over 1 crore cups of tea during the event.

The aim is to set a Guinness World Record for the highest number of cups of tea sold at a single event, KMF said in a statement.

Every cup of tea brewed at the Maha Kumbh Mela will be made with Nandini milk, it said. —*PTI*

While the mother was recovering in the ICU, Nagesh used to sleep outside the hospital **PHOTO: X**

Newborn's dad dies in sleep outside hospital

MYSURU, 13 JAN

A 47-year-old man, who went to sleep on the premises of Cheluvamba Hospital in Mysuru on Sunday night, was found dead on Monday morning.

Police identified the deceased as Nagesh, a resident of Chowdahalli in Chamarajanagar district. His wife was admitted to the hospital and delivered a baby on 9 January.

While the mother was recovering in the ICU, Nagesh used to sleep outside the hospital. He reportedly went to sleep on Sunday around 10.30pm and was found dead on Monday morning at 7am.

After conducting post-mortem examination at KR Hospital, his body was handed over to his relatives. Nagesh's elder brother Shiva Govindu said his brother did not have any health problems. He was working regularly and earning daily wages, Govindu said.

Cheluvamba Hospital Superintendent Sudha said Nagesh had brought in his wife in a serious condition and was taking care of her alone after the delivery. Though the hospital has a dormitory for the bystanders of patients, Nagesh did not use the facility. The hospital has informed Devaraja Police, who are investigating the case, Sudha said. —*Salar News*

WOMAN JUMPS INTO CANAL WITH 4 CHILDREN, 2 DIE

VIJAYPURA, 13 JAN

Two children were found dead while two others went missing after a mother of four in Bennal taluk on Monday jumped into a canal along with them in a bid to end life. Police said 37-year-old Bhagyashree Ningappa Bhajantri from Telagi village jumped into the canal on the way to Bennal village in Nidagundhi taluk on Monday morning.

A few fishermen who witnessed the act rescued the woman and recovered the bodies of five-year-old Tanushri and three-year-old Suraksha. The woman's 13-month-old twin babies are missing. It is believed that the woman took the extreme step because of domestic harassment by her husband and family. —*Salar News*

PHOTO: X

Students protest against fee hike

MYSURU, 13 JAN

A group of students at the University of Mysore (UoM), under the banner of All India Democratic Students Organisation (AIDSO), on Monday protested against a 10 per cent increase in exam fees.

The students gathered in front of the university's Crawford Hall and raised slogans against the varsity officials. They said the varsity has now hiked the fee to Rs. 3,300, and was increasing the amount by 10 per cent every semester.

The agitating students demanded that the varsity withdraw the fee hike, as poor and middle-class students are unable to afford the amount.

Subhash Bettadakoppa, AIDSO state treasurer, said many talented students from poor and middle-class backgrounds are pursuing higher education at the university.

"The examination fee for one semester has surpassed Rs. 3300, which is exorbitant compared to the annual fee of Rs. 3,000 to Rs. 4,000 in many government colleges.

This fee hike has severe implications on students' education, exacerbating the financial crisis faced by most students and parents," Bettadakoppa said.

The university is more focused on profits than students' interests, which is contrary to its motto of providing education to underprivileged students free of cost, Bettadakoppa said, adding that the varsity should reverse the fee hike. —*Salar News*

Man calls control room with bomb threat

BENGALURU, 13 JAN

A 40-year-old man, Mansoor, was arrested by Vidhana Soudha police for allegedly making a hoax bomb threat to the City's police control room (PCR).

On 9 January, Mansoor made an anonymous call to the PCR, claiming that bomb blasts, similar to the Rameswaram Café explosion, would occur across Bengaluru. Authorities took the threat seriously, and a case was filed. An investigation quickly led to Mansoor's arrest. During questioning, Mansoor revealed that the bomb threat was intended to frame another individual, with whom he had a personal dispute. Mansoor, who ran a provision store in Shivajinagar, had lost control of the store after owing money to the other person. In a bid for revenge, he used the individual's phone number to make the threatening call.

- On 9 January, Mansoor made an anonymous call to the PCR, claiming that bomb blasts, similar to the Rameswaram Café explosion, would occur across Bengaluru.

A senior police officer confirmed the motive was personal: "The accused's actions seem driven by vengeance. We are continuing to investigate his connections to other incidents." Police warned against making threats, as they cause panic. —*Salar News*

CHAMARAJPET HORROR

Man arrested for attacking cows had done the same last year too

BENGALURU, 13 JAN

A gruesome attack on cows in Chamarajpet has unveiled deeper issues within the community, as the owner revealed that this was not the first incident involving the arrested assailant, Sheikh Nasir. Describing the ongoing troubles, Karna, the owner of the injured cows, stated, "Last year, the same person was caught trying to harm my cows and was thrashed by local residents. However, no formal complaint was lodged at that time."

Sheikh Nasir, also known as Nasru, a 30-year-old from Champaran district in Bihar, was apprehended by the Cottonpet police after allegedly severing the udders of three cows and slashing their legs with a blade on Sunday morning in Old Pension Mohalla.

Karna discovered the injured animals whilst milking them, expressing suspicion that the attack was linked to protests against the relocation of the Government Veterinary Hospital in Chalavadipalya. "We fought hard to keep the hospital here. I suspect this attack is a conspiracy," he asserted.

Deputy Commissioner of Police, West, S Girish, confirmed that the accused had worked as a helper in a stitching shop near the crime scene and acted alone while under the influence of alcohol.

Authorities have registered a First Information Report (FIR) under Section 325 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) for maiming animals. This incident has reignited concerns regarding rampant drug abuse in the locality, with residents alleging that youths gather for illicit activities at night.

Local resident Raj Kumar lamented, "Despite repeated complaints, no action has been taken," urging for increased police presence.

Political leaders quickly seized upon the incident, with BJP leader R Ashoka alleging it was part of a wider conspiracy to create a "mini-Pakistan" and criticising the government's supposed appeasement of Muslim communities. In contrast, Minister BZ Zameer Ahmed, MLA for Chamarajpet, dismissed claims of a communal angle and offered to donate three cows to the affected farmer. Ashoka also announced a compensation of Rs 1 lakh for the injured animals.

Despite the political rhetoric, local residents affirmed their commitment to harmony within the community. "People from all backgrounds live here peacefully.

This act was inhuman and should be punished," remarked Radha, a long-time resident. Authorities' swift arrest of the offender has been praised, yet residents insist that a more comprehensive approach is needed to tackle the underlying social issues affecting the area.

The injured cows are currently recovering at the Government Veterinary Hospital. —*Salar News*

The injured cows are currently recovering at the Government Veterinary Hospital.

Singapore prez to begin 5-day visit to India today

NEW DELHI, 13 JAN

President of Singapore Tharman Shanmugaratnam will be on a five-day visit to India beginning Tuesday with an aim to give new momentum to the ties between the two countries. It will be Shanmugaratnam's first visit to India as Singapore president. Shanmugaratnam will hold discussions with President Droupadi Murmu, who will also host a banquet in his honour, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said in a statement, announcing the visit. Prime Minister Narendra Modi will meet with the Singaporean president. Shanmugaratnam will be accorded a ceremonial welcome at the forecourt of Rashtrapati Bhavan on 16 January. He will also visit Odisha from 17 to 18 January. *—PTI*

SC to hear Jairam's plea on election rules on Wed

NEW DELHI, 13 JAN

Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh's writ petition in the Supreme Court challenging the recent amendments to the Conduct of Election Rules, 1961, will come up for hearing in the apex court on Wednesday. The matter will come up for hearing before the bench headed by Chief Justice of India Sanjiv Khanna on 15 January, according to the cause list uploaded on the Supreme Court website. Congress had filed the writ petition in the Supreme Court last month challenging the recent amendments to the Conduct of Election Rules, 1961 and expressed hope that the apex court will help restore the "fast eroding" integrity of the electoral process. AICC general secretary Jairam Ramesh, who has filed the petition, had said, "The integrity of the electoral process is fast eroding. Hopefully the Supreme Court will help restore it."*—PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

NCP(SP) denies Patil's ouster as M'rashtra head

NAGPUR, 13 JAN

NCP (SP) on Monday dismissed as "baseless" reports about the demand for replacement of its Maharashtra unit head Jayant Patil, in view of the party's dismal performance in the state assembly polls last year. NCP (SP) state spokesperson Pravin Kunte claimed such reports in a section of media were aimed at maligning Patil's image. NCP (SP) last week held a two-day meeting in Mumbai, against the backdrop of its poor show in the Maharashtra assembly polls held in November last year. The party could win just 10 of the nearly 90 seats where it fielded candidates in the polls to the 288-member state assembly. Party chief Sharad Pawar, its working president Supriya Sule and state head Jayant Patil had attended the two-day meet. *—PTI*

VP hails EC for earning global accolades

NEW DELHI, 13 JAN

Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar on Monday lauded the Election Commission for holding polls that have earned global accolades, saying there will always be an urge to criticise it to get the best of it. Dhankhar also said the independence of the poll panel is never a casualty as the bureaucracy is so trained and the election machinery so greased and fuelled. The VP's remarks came amid Opposition's attacks on the EC over allegations of fudges in voter turnout data and the efficacy of electronic voting machines. "We have an Election Commission that has worked... in a fashion that global recognition is coming to it. Many countries want their elections to be overseen by our Election Commission," he said. *—PTI*

Modi opens Z-Morh tunnel; Omar lauds PM in J&K

CM Omar praises PM for bridging gap between 'dil' & Delhi

SRINAGAR, 13 JAN

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday inaugurated the strategically important Z-Morh tunnel in the Sonamarg area of Jammu and Kashmir which will make the tourist resort accessible round the year.

After inaugurating the Rs 2,700 crore project, the prime minister went inside the tunnel and interacted with the project officials. He also met the construction workers who worked meticulously amid harsh conditions to complete the tunnel.

Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Omar Abdullah praised Prime Minister Narendra Modi for his efforts in bridging the gap between "Dil (heart) and Delhi" and holding assembly polls in the Union Territory while exuding confidence that the statehood restoration promise would soon be fulfilled.

"Prime minister, when you came to Srinagar for a programme after getting a third term (in office), people started believing your words. You talked about three important things which included your efforts to bridge 'Dil ki duri aur Delhi se duri', and you have proved it by your work.

This is his first visit to Jammu and Kashmir after the assembly elections in September-October last year.

The 6.5 km-long two-lane bi-directional road tunnel between Gagangir and Sonamarg in central Kashmir's Ganderbal district is equipped with a parallel 7.5-metre escape passage for emergencies.

Situated at an altitude of over 8,650 feet above sea level, the tunnel will enhance all-weather connectivity between Srinagar and Sonamarg en route to Leh, bypassing routes prone to landslides and avalanches.

The tunnel will also promote tourism by ensuring year-round connectivity to Sonamarg.

Along with the Zojila tunnel, set to be completed by 2028, the Z-Morh tunnel will reduce the distance between the Kashmir Valley and Ladakh from 49 km to 43 km and boost vehicle speed from 30 km/hr to 70 km/hr.

Modi asserted that he would keep promises he made to the people of Jammu and Kashmir, in an oblique reference to the demand for restoration of statehood voiced strongly by Chief Minister Omar Abdullah.

Speaking earlier at function, Abdullah pressed for restoration of statehood to Jammu and Kashmir as promised by the prime minister and said, "My heart believes that you will fulfil this soon". *—PTI*

Prime Minister Narendra Modi during the inauguration of the Z-Morh tunnel, in J&K, on Monday **PHOTO: PTI**

'WILL ALWAYS SUPPORT UDF'

Kerala MLA PV Anvar quits, blames leaders

T'PURAM, 13 JAN

PHOTO: ANI

Kerala legislator PV Anvar, who joined the Trinamool Congress recently after parting ways with the ruling LDF a few months ago, resigned on Monday as the MLA of the Nilambur constituency.

Anvar met Speaker A N Shamseer in his chamber at the Legislative Assembly complex here and handed over his resignation letter in the morning.

The Independent MLA accused certain leaders of changing their stand on the issue of corruption. Anvar clarified that his allegations were directed at the Chief Minister's political secretary and other officials, including former Malappuram collector Sujith Das, who had reportedly placed individuals from a specific community on the accused list.

A businessman-turned-politician, Anvar clarified that although he had no plans to resign earlier, he made the decision to quit as per the suggestion of Mamata Banerjee, with whom he had a detailed discussion via video call.

Anvar, who won the Nilambur seat as a CPI(M)-led LDF supported MLA, had recently announced that he would serve as the state coordinator for the Mamata Banerjee-led party.

He requested the Speaker to accept his resignation. A possible disqualification move by the CPI(M)-led LDF is said to be the reason behind Anvar's decision to resign as an MLA.

Soon after Anvar announced his resignation, the TMC leadership in West Bengal officially announced him as their Kerala state convenor.

In a dramatic move, Anvar also announced that he would not contest the by-election from the Nilambur seat and offered his support to the Congress-led UDF in the constituency. *—PTI/Agencies*

Kejri accuses BJP of 'betraying' Jats over reservation issue

NEW DELHI, 13 JAN

AAP supremo Arvind Kejriwal on Monday accused the BJP of "betraying" the Jats of Delhi over the issue of reservation, asking the party when will they be included in the Centre's list for the Other Backward Classes (OBC).

Kejriwal met a delegation of Jat leaders at his residence, ahead of the Delhi Assembly polls on 5 February.

The community accounts for a significant chunk of votes in some Assembly constituencies in the national capital, especially in the outer Delhi areas.

The Jats here are included in Delhi's OBC list but not in the Centre's list, Kejriwal said.

"Jats from Rajasthan can get admissions in the Delhi University and its colleges, jobs in the AIIMS, Safdarjung Hospital and all the central government organisations but not the Jats of Delhi," the former chief minister said at a press conference.

Meanwhile, BJP is hopeful of "markedly improving" its performance in Dalit-dominated constituencies of the city on the basis of a sustained and focussed outreach campaign spread over months ahead polls, party leaders said. *—PTI*

AAP national convener Arvind Kejriwal with Delhi Chief Minister leader Atishi, Punjab CM Bhagwant Mann, and party leaders Sanjay Singh and Raghav Chadha address the media, in New Delhi **PHOTO: PTI**

CBI path clear to prosecute AAP's Jain

NEW DELHI, 13 JAN

The CBI on Monday informed a Delhi court that it had obtained requisite sanctions to prosecute AAP leader and former Delhi minister Satyendar Jain in a disproportionate assets' case.

The probe agency made the submission before special judge Jitendra Singh, who posted the hearing to 22 January.

The judge observed a supplementary chargesheet was filed against Jain in the case on 4 January. The CBI alleged that the minister amassed assets disproportionate to his known sources of income to the extent of approximately Rs 1.62 crore between 14 February, 2015, and 31May, 2017.

BANSURI REJECTS DEFAMATION CLAIM

Meanwhile, BJP MP Bansuri Swaraj on Monday said the defamation case filed against her by AAP's Satyendra Jain in a Delhi court was "politically motivated".

The MP's counsel submitted before additional chief judicial magistrate Neha Mittal that the case's facts were available in the public domain and it couldn't be classified as defamation.

"The timing in this case is important as the person is contesting an election. The petition is politically motivated and it has been filed to gain political advantage," the counsel said.

Jain's lawyer opposed the submissions, calling Swaraj's statements "contrary to the facts".

The court posted the hearing to 22 January.

Jain accused Swaraj of making defamatory remarks against him on a news channel on 5 October. *—PTI*

Raut: No alliance can succeed if dialogue stops

MUMBAI, 13 JAN

Days after the Shiv Sena (UBT) announced to go solo in the local body polls in Maharashtra, party leader Sanjay Raut on Monday said no alliance can succeed if dialogue among its partners ceases.

He also said there was nothing wrong in contesting elections against coalition partners, but in such cases, no party should dub their former or potential future allies as "traitors".

On Monday, while speaking about the INDIA bloc, Raut said, "It is the collective desire of all of us to progress further in the political landscape of this country. However, over the past few days, some of our alliance partners seem to have taken the stance that communication has broken down. No alliance can succeed if dialogue is severed." *—PTI*

BJP slams Kejri, asks if he feels above the Constitution

NEW DELHI, 13 JAN

BJP Monday asked AAP chief Arvind Kejriwal if he considers himself above the Constitution as it attacked him over the Delhi government not tabling the CAG reports in assembly.

BJP national spokesperson Sudhanshu Trivedi said the constitutional scheme requires a government to table reports of the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG), which scrutinises its revenue and expenses, but the AAP dispensation has not done it.

"Does he consider himself above the Constitution?" he posed. Trivedi alleged that the "anarchist character" AAP is pervading the constitutional system.

Noting that there are almost a dozen reports of the CAG related to the finances of the Delhi government, he said the AAP dispensation has refused to table them in the assembly claiming that there is no need for it.

Despite AAP heading one of the numerically strongest governments Kejriwal has done nothing, he said. *—PTI*

ATISHI TO FILE NOMINATION PAPERS TODAY

NEW DELHI, 13 JAN

Delhi Chief Minister Atishi could not file her nomination from the Kalkaji Assembly constituency on Monday, an AAP leader said. Accompanied by senior party leader Manish Sisodia, the chief minister held a roadshow after paying obeisance at a gurudwara in Giri Nagar and then proceeded towards to file her nomination. However, as the roadshow got her delayed, she went to Election Commission without filing nomination. *—PTI*

INDIA bloc lacks ideology: Bawankule

NAGPUR, 13 JAN

Maharashtra BJP chief and Revenue Minister Chandrashekhar Bawankule on Monday claimed the INDIA bloc was disintegrating, as it has no ideology and policy for the nation's development.

Bawankule said in Nagpur that the alliance was broken and scattered, and in Maharashtra, the Shiv Sena (UBT) was against the Congress.

"The INDIA bloc doesn't have any policy for the nation's development. They came together for power, and now without power, all leaders of the alliance have scattered away. In Maharashtra, you can see Uddhav Thackeray and Sharad Pawar are against the Congress because they don't have an ideology," he said.

The BJP leader said the Mahayuti alliance of the BJP, Shiv Sena and NCP has an ideology and progressive vision and will always remain united.

Bawankule said the final decision about assigning guardian ministers would be taken by 15 or 16 January. He further said that the Mukyamantri Majhi Ladki Bahin Yojana will continue, and no action will be taken against anyone. But the allowance will be stopped for bogus beneficiaries.

The government had earlier announced that it would address complaints regarding bogus beneficiaries of the Ladki Bahin scheme and get information. *—PTI*

BJP chief Chandrashekar Bawankule **PHOTO: PTI**

Weed out fake Ladki Bahin claimants: Bhujbal

NASHIK, 13 JAN

Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) leader Chhagan Bhujbal on Monday demanded that ineligible women beneficiaries of Ladki Bahin Yojana either voluntarily relinquish the scheme or the government should impose fines.

Eligible women from financially disadvantaged sections receive a monthly cash aid of Rs 1,500 under the Maharashtra government's flagship Mukhyamantri Majhi Ladki Bahin Yojana.

Bhujbal alleged the scheme forms were filled without due diligence, and some people received the benefits sans scrutiny.

"The government should ask beneficiaries who do not meet the criteria to voluntarily give up the benefits. If they fail to do so, the government should impose fines on them," Bhujbal said in his assembly constituency Yeola in Nashik district.

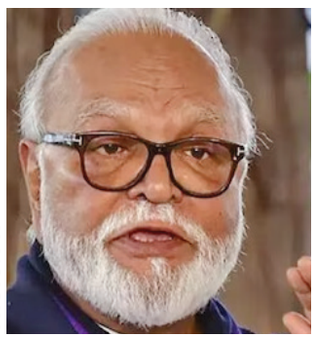

PHOTO: PTI

Bhujbal is disappointed that the NCP led by Deputy CM Ajit Pawar didn't induct him into the state cabinet.

Maharashtra has over 2.43 crore beneficiaries of the Ladki Bahin Yojana, costing the state exchequer approximately Rs 3,700 crore per month.

State Women and Child Development Minister Aditi Tatkare last month dismissed reports about the Mahayuti government's purported plan to re-scrutinise applications of beneficiaries under the scheme for women. *—PTI*

CLIMBS ON TOP OF WATER TANK

Slain sarpanch's brother threatens suicide

CHHATRAPATI SAMBHAJINAGAR, 13 JAN

Dhananjay Deshmukh, brother of slain Beed sarpanch Santosh Deshmukh, climbed a village water tank on Monday and threatened to jump, alleging that information about the investigation was not shared with the family.

Santosh's family members and Opposition leaders also demanded that state minister Dhananjay Munde's aide Walmik Karad, arrested in a related extortion case, be booked for murder.

Dhananjay had claimed a potential threat to his life from the murder accused once they were freed.

Santosh, the sarpanch of Massajog village, was abducted, tortured and murdered on 9 December. Preliminary investigation suggested Santosh had tried to thwart an extortion bid on an energy firm operating a windmill project in the region.

Dhananjay Deshmukh, brother of slain Beed sarpanch Santosh Deshmukh, with his family **PHOTO: PTI**

- Santosh, the sarpanch of Massajog village, was abducted, tortured and murdered on 9 December. Preliminary investigation suggested Santosh had tried to thwart an extortion bid on an energy firm operating a windmill project in the region

Dhananjay climbed the water tank around noon on Monday, a day after he warned of staging agitation on a mobile phone network tower and jumping to death.

The agitation on Monday caused a flutter in the village as Dhananjay refused to heed the pleas of his family members and villagers.

Maratha quota leader Manoj Jarange and Beed superintendent of police (SP) Navneet Kanwat reached the spot and convinced Dhananjay to come down. On the SP's assurance, Dhanajay came down around 2.30pm.

Earlier, Jarange spoke to Dhananjay on phone and told him that officials of CID would be asked to visit the village. "Please come down. I will talk to you. I can come up if you want," Kanwat said.

Police have so far arrested seven persons in the Santosh Deshmukh murder case, while one accused is on the run. *—PTI*

Maha Kumbh: The biggest holy gathering

The sprawling event, spread over 10K acres, is set to accommodate 5L to 1 cr people at any time

Devotees gather to take a holy dip at the Sangam on the first day of Maha Kumbh Mela 2025, in Prayagraj, Uttar Pradesh, on Monday **PHOTO: PTI**

MAHAKUMBH NAGAR, 13 JAN

The Maha Kumbh Mela, which began on Monday at Prayagraj, has attracted millions of devotees who believe bathing in the holy confluence of the Ganga, Yamuna, and Saraswati will purify them and grant them 'moksha'.

Authorities have made substantial preparations to manage the massive influx of people.

The sprawling event, spread over 10,000 acres, is set to accommodate 50 lakh to 1 crore people at any given time. Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath outlined the government's plans, highlighting the use of a digital tourist map for monitoring cleanliness and AI-powered security systems integrated with smartphones to ensure safety.

He also emphasised the high standards of cleanliness, safety, and modernity that the event aims to set, ensuring that the devotees' experience is smooth and secure. Over 55 police stations have been set up, with 45,000 police personnel deployed to handle the large crowd.

In addition, 30 pontoon bridges have been prepared to facilitate the movement of people across the Sangam and Phaphamau areas.

For crowd control, sector-wise ghats have been created, and 'Bhula-Bhatka' camps have been established to reunite lost pilgrims with their groups. Within the first few hours, more than 250 people were safely reunited, showcasing the efficiency of these systems. The first royal bath, or 'shahi snan', is expected to take place on Makar Sankranti on January 14, when the number of devotees is expected to peak.

This year's Maha Kumbh is expected to be the largest and most organized in history, thanks to innovative measures and a large-scale logistical operation. As

The first of the 'shahi snans', royal baths, takes place on Tuesday, Makar Sankranti, when the numbers taking a dip in the waters are expected to rise. The last of the 'snans' will be on Mahashivratri on 26 February.

The origins of the Kumbh Mela go back in the folds of time. The Rigveda speaks of a divine event called the "Sagar Manthan" or churning of the cosmic ocean, which is considered the genesis of the Maha Kumbh Mela, according to the website kumbh.gov.in. Legend has it that during this cosmic churning, a pot (Kumbh) containing the elixir of immortality (amrita) emerged.

The celestial struggle for possession led to a battle that spanned 12 days, equivalent to 12 human years. Drops of the nectar fell at four locations, Prayagraj, Ujjain, Nashik and Haridwar, where the Kumbh Mela is celebrated. *—PTI*

Laurene Powell, widow of Apple co-founder Steve Jobs is now given a Hindu name 'Kamala,' as she will attend the Maha Kumbh Mela in Prayagraj, guided by Swami Kailashanand Giri Ji Maharaj **PHOTO: PTI**

Mumbai BEST strike called off after police intervention

MUMBAI, 13 JAN

The contractual employees of a private operator hired by civic-run BEST went on a flash strike at one of the undertaking's bus depots in Mumbai early Monday morning, with the stir being called off later after police intervention. Bus services normalised slowly after those protesting resumed duty at 12:30pm, a Brihanmumbai Electric Supply and Transport undertaking spokesperson said. The strike was triggered by a dispute between employees of this private operator and supervisors of Pratiksha Nagar depot that took place on January 10, he said. These employees resumed work after the intervention of the police, the official informed. Earlier, BEST public relations officer Sudas Sawant told PTI employees of the wet lease operator Mateshwari were on strike over their demands, leading to buses remaining off road. *—PTI*

Chhattisgarh: Minor injured as Naxalites IED explodes

SUKMA, 13 JAN

A 10-year-old girl was injured when a pressure improvised explosive device (IED) planted by Naxalites went off in Chhattisgarh's Sukma district, police said on Monday. The incident took place on Sunday evening on the outskirts of Timmapuram village under Chintalnar police station area, a senior police official said. As per preliminary information, the girl inadvertently stepped over the pressure IED, triggering the blast, he said. The girl suffered injuries and was shifted to a hospital, the official said, adding her condition was reported to be stable. Civilians have in the past also fallen prey to such traps laid by Naxalites in the region, police said. *—PTI*

Minor girl killed in leopard attack in Gujarat's Amreli

AMRELI, 13 JAN

A 7-year-old girl has been mauled to death by a leopard in Gujarat's Amreli district, prompting authorities to set up cage traps in the area to catch the big cat, officials said on Monday. The leopard attacked the girl while she was accompanying her parents working at a cotton field in Chitrasar village on Sunday evening, Range Forest Officer, Rajula, GL Vaghela said. The girl suffered serious injuries on her neck and died after being taken to a hospital at Jafrabad in the district, the official said. The forest department has formed eight teams and set up cages in the surrounding areas to capture the feline, he said. *—PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

Odisha: 'Protector' of timber, big cat Sundari dies

BARIPADA, 13 JAN

A 66-year-old tusker engaged in protecting timber and tigers in the Similipal Tiger Reserve (STR) in Odisha's Mayurbhanj district, has died during treatment, a senior forest department official said on Monday. On Sunday around 10.30pm, the elephant, Mahendra, died in the Chahala camp. The jumbo had stopped eating from Sunday morning and it died of old age-related weakness, STR field director Dr Prakash Chand Gogineni said. Mahendra, a trained jumbo, was brought to Similipal in December 2001 from the Rajiv Gandhi National Park in Karnataka, along with two female elephants Bhavani and Shobha. Forest officials and local communities on Monday mourned Mahendra's death and described the tusker as a true "hero" as it was a protector of wildlife in Similipal. *—PTI*

Delhi govt delayed CAG report: HC

NEW DELHI, 13 JAN

Delhi High Court on Monday said the state government dragged its feet on the issue of tabling of several CAG reports before the assembly, rasing "doubts on its bonafides".

Justice Sachin Datta, who was hearing a petition by the BJP MLAs, said the government should have promptly placed the CAG reports before the house for discussion.

"The way you dragged your feet raises doubts about your bonafides. You should have promptly forwarded the reports to the speaker," Justice Datta said, "and had a discussion in the house. The timeline is stark. See the way you have been dragging your feet is something that is unfortunate."

Opposition leader Vijender Gupta and BJP MLAs Mohan Singh Bisht, Om Prakash Sharma, Ajay Kumar Mahawar, Abhay Verma, Anil Kumar Bajpai and Jitendra Mahajan filed the petition last year and sought a direction to the speaker to call a session of the assembly for the purpose of tabling of the CAG reports.

Justice Datta, during the hearing, said calling an assembly session was the prerogative of the speaker and asked if the court could pass a direction to the speaker to do it, especially when the elections were around the corner.

Senior counsel for the government raised an objection with respect to the "political" nature of the petition, and alleged the LG office had made the reports public and shared it with newspapers.

"How does it matter?" asked the court. The hearing is underway. *—PTI*

TEMPLE-MOSQUE RIFT

Vacate mosques built on temples: Akhara head

MAHAKUMBH NAGAR, JAN 13

Raking up the temple–mosque controversy, president of the Akhil Bharatiya Akhara Parishad Mahant Ravindra Puri on Monday demanded that ancient temples "converted" into mosques across the country should be vacated.

The president of the akhara, which is an apex religious body of 13 monastic Hindu orders, also said that there is no bar on Muslims visiting Maha Kumbh.

"When I went for a tour across India for 'dharma prachar' (propagation of religion), the dome of most of the mosques resembled that of a temple, and you will find symbols of Sanatan inside them. Around 80 per cent of mosques are (built) on temples all over India," said Puri, who is also the president of the Mansa Devi Temple Trust in Haridwar.

Asked about requesting Muslims to handover such structures to Hindus, Puri said, "We have appealed a thousand times for this. Our ancient temples, which have been converted into mosques, should be vacated. We are ready to return a temple if it has been built over a mosque. We make the request once again from the Maha Kumbh."

"We have demanded the formation of a Sanatan Board. A Dharma Sansad will be organised to which we have invited prominent seers from inside and outside the country. The main issue will be the formation of Sanatan Board like the Waqf Board, so that our 'math' and temples are safe. *—PTI*

Mahant Ravindra Puri **PHOTO: X**

Expedite Badlapur sexual assault trial: HC

MUMBAI, 13 JAN

The Bombay High Court on Monday said the trial in the last year's Badlapur school sexual assault case should be fast-tracked and conducted expeditiously as the victims are very young. In August last year, a male attendant sexually assaulted the two girls – aged four and five – inside the toilet of their school in Badlapur area of Maharashtra's Thane district. The culprit was arrested and later killed in a shootout with police when he was being taken from jail for questioning. *—PTI*

Bail not must for filing nomination, says Delhi HC

NEW DELHI, 13 JAN

Former AAP councillor Tahir Hussain, accused in several cases arising out of the February 2020 riots, can file his nomination papers from jail itself, the Delhi High Court was told on Monday. Additional Solicitor General Chetan Sharma, while responding on behalf of the police to Hussain's plea seeking interim bail, said there were instances of inmates filing their nominations for elections from prison. Justice Neena Bansal Krishna also orally observed that Hussain can file nomination papers in jail. *—PTI*

Cops stop exhumation of 'samadhi' man's body

T'PURAM, 13 JAN

Dramatic scenes unfolded on Monday in Neyyattinkara here, when family members and some local residents opposed the police's attempt to exhume the body of a 69-year-old man, whose family claimed that he had attained 'samadhi'.

Following the protest, the police temporarily halted their attempt to exhume the body to investigate the mystery surrounding Gopan Swami's death and the authorities decided to initiate discussions with the family to resolve the issue.

"The family members have been summoned to the Neyyattinkara police station. We will hold discussions with them before deciding on further action," Thiruvananthapuram Sub-Collector Alfred O V said.

Tension escalated around noon when a police team led by the Neyyattinkara DySP, along with other officials, arrived at the burial site at Kavuvilakam to exhume the body of Gopan Swami. *—PTI*

ARMY DAY PARADE

Army Day Parade this year will see participation of all-girl NCC contingent, women Agniveers, robotic mules, & Mission Olympics tableaux **PHOTO: PTI**

Situation at LAC sensitive but stable: Army chief

NEW DELHI, 13 JAN

The situation along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) is sensitive but stable, Army Chief Gen Upendra Dwivedi said on Monday.

Addressing a press conference ahead of the Army Day, Gen Dwivedi said there is still a degree of standoff in the region and efforts are needed to restore trust between the Indian and the Chinese militiaries.

The Army chief said patrolling and grazing in traditional areas have started in Depsang and Demchok, the two friction points from where the two sides have disengaged.

In the last year, 60 per cent of terrorists eliminated were of Pakistan origin, he said. *—PTI*

Upendra Dwivedi **PHOTO: X**

Survival chances fade for trapped Assam miners

GUWAHATI, 13 JAN

The chances of survival of the five coal miners trapped inside an abandoned quarry in Assam's Dima Hasao district continue to diminish as dewatering operations entered the eighth day on Monday, officials said.

Nine workers were trapped inside the mine in Umrangshu, around 250km from Guwahati, on 6 January, with four bodies recovered so far.

The mine is being dewatered using pumping machines brought in by the Oil and Natural Gas Corporation and Coal India.

The water level in the quarry has dropped significantly, but it remains unclear when it will be "completely cleared or when rescue and search operations inside the quarry will resume," an official at the site said.

Rescue operations are being carried out jointly by the navy, army, Assam Rifles, NDRF, SDRF and the district administration since the first day. *—PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

Class 12 student found hanging in Odisha hostel

BHUBANESWAR, 13 JAN

The body of a class 12 girl student of Utkal Sangeet Mahavidyalaya was found hanging in her hostel room here on Monday, a police official said.

The deceased was identified as Utkalika Swain, a resident of Kendrapara district. Swain allegedly used her dupatta to hang herself from the ceiling fan in her room, police added.

After getting information, officials from Capital Police station reached the hostel and started an investigation. Police have seized mobile phone of deceased. *—PTI*

MP GOVT TO BRAHMINS

'Aim for 4 children, get Rs 1 lakh'

BHOPAL, 13 JAN

The head of the Madhya Pradesh government's Parshuram Kalyan Board, Pandit Vishnu Rajoria, has announced a Rs 1 lakh reward for young Brahmin couples who have four children. Rajoria, who holds a cabinet minister rank, made the announcement at an event in Indore, emphasizing the need to focus on family expansion to protect future generations.

"The number of heretics is increasing because we've stopped focusing on our families," Rajoria said, urging young couples to aim for at least four children. He added, "Youngsters get settled and stop after one child. This is very problematic. Whether or not I remain the board president, the award will be given."

PHOTO: X

Addressing concerns about the cost of education, Rajoria dismissed them, stating, "Manage somehow, but don't lag in giving birth to children. Otherwise, heretics will capture this country."

Later, speaking to NDTV, Rajoria clarified that his announcement was a personal initiative, not a government policy. "This is my social statement made in a community programme. The Brahmin society can support education and training for these children," he said.

The remarks sparked criticism, with Congress leader Mukesh Nayak urging Rajoria to reconsider. "Population growth is one of the world's biggest problems. A paranoia is being created that Muslims will outnumber Hindus. These are imaginary fears. Our country will be powerful only when united," Nayak said.

The BJP distanced itself from Rajoria's comments. *—Agencies*

CELEBRATING LOHRI

People dance and sing around the bonfire to celebrate harvest festival 'Lohri', in Lucknow on Monday *PHOTO: PTI*

Indian Bengalis caught in B'desh immigration row

Taslima Noor, 34, told DW that she has not slept for days since police in New Delhi, intensified their drive to detain Bangladeshis who they claim are in the country illegally.

"I have been working here for seven years, and I am fearful that the authorities will create trouble for my family," said Noor, who is a domestic worker.

Noor is from a Bengali-speaking region of Cooch Behar in West Bengal, near the border with Bangladesh.

Since the beginning of the year, nine Bangladeshis have been deported from India, reportedly as part of a broader drive to clamp down on irregular immigration within the city. A number of Bengali-speaking Indians told DW that they have also been caught up in the dragnet.

Abdul Quddus, a construction worker who is also from Cooch Behar and has been living in Delhi for over a decade, told DW that police personnel recently visited his house.

"I have all the requisite documentation to establish my Indian bona fides but have been questioned three times already," Quddus told DW.

BJP calls the crackdown a necessary measure to uphold national security and electoral integrity *PHOTO: PTI*

A BJP-driven clampdown

So far, the police have already initiated deportation processes for more than 25 people, questioned over 5,000, and claimed to have dismantled a syndicate involved in facilitating irregular immigration and the issuance of fake identification documents.

"Four people, including two Bangladeshi nationals and two Indian facilitators, who had been living here have been arrested," Joint Commissioner of Police Sanjay Kumar Jain said.

With elections for the Delhi Assembly scheduled for February, opponents of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's BJP say the clampdown is politically motivated.

In return, BJP and its allies have accused Delhi state's governing Aam Aadmi Party of using people in India illegally as a voter base, an accusation the AAP refutes.

BJP calls the crackdown a necessary measure to uphold national security and electoral integrity.

"This is a due process of law and that must begin somewhere," BJP spokesperson Tom Vadakkan told DW.

"The right to have your vote counted in a clean election is the right of every citizen,"Vadakkan said.

"It is worrisome when you have so many illegal migrants that can muddy the electoral process."

Many politicians are also insisting that Bangladeshis working without authorization are taking away their jobs.

However, despite the long history of cross-border movement between Bangladesh and India, little data exists regarding the number of migrants or their effect on employment.

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Dangerous election narratives

With no real data available for immigration numbers, observers fear that the ongoing clampdown in Delhi will lead to broader tensions over immigration and citizenship rights. "This electoral battle in Delhi is about creating a series of vote-catching narratives. Fanning anti-immigration sentiment is one of them," Sunil Kumar Aledia, executive director of the Centre for Holistic Development, an organization that advocates for the rights of homeless people, told DW. Aledia said the clampdown disproportionately affects people who are already marginalized and is leading to fears of wrongful detentions and deportations. "There is a need for humane treatment of all individuals," Aledia said, regardless of their immigration status." Quddus, the construction worker from eastern India, said he hoped that the clampdown would end and that he and his neighbors would no longer have to live in constant fear. "There is apprehension among the Bengali-speaking community," Quddus said, "especially about how the drive will impact our vulnerable population." *—DW News*

LETTERS write to us at salarenglishdigital@gmail.com

SALAR سالار

After humble start, IMD leads weather race at 150

From a few rain gauges in 1875 to rivalling the world's best weather agencies, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) has weathered its way to becoming a global leader in forecasting.

Born out of calamities -- a devastating cyclone in 1864 and monsoon failures in 1866 and 1871 -- the IMD, turning 150 on January 15, has transformed from a humble setup into a cutting-edge hub of weather science.

"HF Blandford, the first Meteorological Reporter to the then Government of India, prepared the first rainfall map of the country (undivided India) using data from 77 rain gauges... The IMD has come a long way since its modest start," IMD Director General Mrutyunjaya Mohapatra told PTI.

According to its 2023 report, the IMD operates 39 Doppler Weather Radars, INSAT 3D/3DR satellites providing 15-minute cloud updates, and a robust network of 806 Automatic Weather Stations, 200 Agro-AWS, 5,896 rain monitoring stations, 83 lightning sensors and 63 Pilot Balloon Stations.

The IMD's key advancements include rapid severe weather assessments (2015), 6-minute cyclone scans (2018) and upgraded satellite systems.

Its advanced numerical weather prediction models now deliver seamless forecasts from a few hours to an entire season, backed by high-resolution global models and seasonal forecast systems introduced between 2016 and 2021.

Mohapatra said improvements in observations, communication, modelling and infrastructure have significantly enhanced weather and climate services.

"Forecast accuracy for severe weather events improved by about 50 per cent in 2023 compared to 2014. This has significantly reduced the loss of lives and property during extreme weather events," he said.

By 2023, the accuracy of five-day forecasts matched the one-day forecast accuracy of 2017. Cyclone landfall forecasts have become highly precise, with zero error in most cases (20 km for 24-hour forecasts).

The 24-hour forecast accuracy stands at 80 per cent for heavy rainfall, 86 per cent for thunderstorms, and 88 per cent for heat and cold waves.

To make this information accessible to the public in simple language, the IMD has launched several mobile applications, including 'Mausam', which provides weather forecasts for every location in the country.

The IMD achieved all this despite India's complex weather patterns compared to many developed countries.

M Ravichandran, Secretary, Ministry of Earth Sciences, said India's tropical weather is characterised by extreme variations, making it more challenging to predict than Europe's relatively stable weather patterns.

"Our weather challenges are more complex. Still, on a global level, the IMD is ranked among the top three weather agencies, the other two being the National Weather Service of the US and the European Centre for Medium-Range Weather Forecasts," he said.

Mohapatra said that in 2010, the IMD's cyclone forecast accuracy was 50 per cent lower than the US National Weather Service. "Today, our forecast accuracy is 30 per cent better than that of the US National Hurricane Centre," he said.

"If you look at the lead time of forecasts and data resolution, we are on par with or better than many developed countries," the IMD chief said.

The IMD not only serves India but also provides cyclone forecasts and warnings to 13 North Indian Ocean countries and weather services to SAARC nations.

It is helping Nepal, the Maldives, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Mauritius develop early warning systems to reduce the loss of life and property caused by worsening extreme weather events.

As weather patterns grow more unpredictable globally due to the climate crisis, the IMD is taking a giant leap with 'Mission Mausam' to improve weather understanding and forecasting through expanded observation networks, better modelling and advanced tools like AI and machine learning. The mission includes creating a laboratory to artificially develop clouds, increasing the number of radars by over 150 per cent and adding new satellites, supercomputers and other innovations.

Ravichandran said the long-term goal is to move from just predicting weather to managing it, making India weather-ready and climate-smart. *—PTI*

IMD also provides cyclone forecasts and warnings to 13 North Indian Ocean countries *PHOTO: ANI*

Trump's return as US Prez is greeted with dread by Palestinians

The re-election of Donald Trump as the next US President was greeted in the Middle East with a mixture of rapture and dread, especially among Palestinians.

While it is impossible to know exactly how a second Trump Presidency will act toward the Palestinian people and their demands for statehood, his first Presidency provides a guide to what they might expect.

Like all his predecessors, in his first term, President Trump's dealings with Israelis and Palestinians were overwhelmingly influenced by domestic political pressures, which meant unwavering support for Israel. However, true to the nature of his norm-breaking first term, Trump often dismissed long-held diplomatic norms in search of a resolution to the Palestinian/Israeli conflict. By doing so, his Administration sought to remove any obstacles to "peace" between Palestinians and Israelis – a "peace" that would paradoxically see the end of any hope for a Palestinian state. In 2017, the US announced that its embassy in Israel would relocate from Tel Aviv to West Jerusalem. While Israelis celebrated this news, it ran against diplomatic conventions concerning the status of Jerusalem, which had been in operation since 1967.

Jerusalem divided

The 1948 War of Independence divided Jerusalem, with East Jerusalem controlled by Jordan and West Jerusalem by Israel. When Israel captured East Jerusalem in 1967, it was hugely symbolic because it meant that for the first time in almost two millennia, Jews controlled all the ideologically, religiously, politically, and culturally significant city of Jerusalem.

Nevertheless, the international community refused to accept Israel's occupation nor its subsequent annexation of East Jerusalem in 1980, declaring that the negotiations concerning the two-state solution would decide the fate of Jerusalem. Consequently, most states have their embassies in Tel Aviv. Palestinians and Israelis interpreted the Trump administration's decision as US recognition of Israeli sovereignty of all Jerusalem.

Second, in November 2019, the Trump administration declared that Israeli settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem were consistent with international law. Israel began building settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem soon after their victory in the 1967 War.

Settlements expanding

According to Peace Now, in 2023, approximately 465,000 Israeli settlers were living in the West Bank, located in over 350 settlements and outposts. There were also an additional 230,000 Israelis living in settlements in East Jerusalem.

The administration's decision mirrored the long-held Israeli legal argument that the settlements are not illegal because the international community never deemed Jordan's occupation of the West Bank and East Jerusalem as legal. As these territories were not part of Jordan's sovereign territory, they could not be "occupied" by Israel, meaning it could settle the land as it wished. Nevertheless, this position ran contrary to Article 49 of the Fourth Geneva Convention, which states that: "the Occupying power shall not deport or transfer parts of its civilian population into the territory it occupied." Consequently, the international community, including the United Nations, the International Criminal Court (ICC), and the International Court of Justice (ICJ), has consistently deemed Israeli settlements as illegal and as impediments to any peace agreement between Palestinians and Israelis. However, the administration's rationale for its decision was that declaring the settlements illegal only restrains and impedes the negotiation process and, thus, any progress towards a successful resolution of the Palestinian/Israeli conflict. Around the same time, the Trump administration announced that it would no longer contribute funding to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), the principal UN aid agency for Palestinians.

President Trump's dealings with Israelis and Palestinians were overwhelmingly influenced by domestic political pressures, which meant unwavering support for Israel. *PHOTO: PTI*

What followed was a budget cut of 30%, culminating in profound humanitarian effects on Palestinians, especially for Gazans, who relied heavily on UNRWA's provision of essential services to survive after Israel placed the Strip under siege following Hamas's election victory in 2006. Again, the administration's position mirrored that of the Israeli government, which has long criticised UNRWA for allegedly supporting terrorism. Pointedly, Israel's position is motivated by its belief that UNRWA's aid undercut its ability to manipulate Hamas's government in Gaza by determining how much assistance it let into the Strip. UNRWA also reports back to the UN about the dire humanitarian situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory , highlighting the deprivations and human rights abuses of Israel's occupation and siege.

Trump's "Deal of the Century"

In 2020, the Trump Administration published its so-called "Deal of the Century", intending to resolve the Palestinian/Israeli conflict finally. However, Palestinians rejected the plan outright, incensed by proposals to rescind Jordanian custody of Haram al-Sharif and transfer control to Israel.

Haram al-Sharif, or the Dome of the Rock mosque, is the third holiest site in Islam. When Jordan signed a peace agreement with Israel in 1994, Israel agreed to recognise Jordan's custodianship of the Muslim holy sites in Jerusalem, specifically Haram al-Sharif. Rescinding control of Haram al-Sharif to Israel meant it would control all the disputed city.

Importantly, for Palestinians in any peace agreement with Israel, East Jerusalem would become the capital of the future Palestinian state — without East Jerusalem, there can be no Palestine.

While things changed marginally under the Biden Administration, the asymmetry between Palestinians and Israelis increased dramatically following the 7 October attacks.

Given Trump's overwhelming support for Israel, there is little indication that Palestinians will be given equitable treatment in his second term. *—PTI*

Verdict in Al-Qadir case against Imran postponed

ISLAMABAD, 13 JAN

A Pakistan court on Monday postponed for the third time the announcement of the verdict in the 190 million pounds Al-Qadir Trust corruption case against former prime minister Imran Khan and his wife Bushra Bibi. The anti-corruption court in Islamabad has now set 17 January as the new date for announcing the verdict. Judge Nasir Javed Rana of the anti-corruption court completed the hearing in the case on 18 December but reserved the judgment until 23 December. Later he fixed 6 January as the new date for announcing the verdict, Geo News reported. The postponement comes amidst the ongoing negotiation between the government and Khan's PTI to address the political instability in the country due to his imprisonment. *—PTI*

2 killed in coal mine collapse in Balochistan

ISLAMABAD, 13 JAN

Two miners have been killed when a coal mine collapsed in Pakistan's restive Balochistan, the second mining disaster in the area within a week. The tragedy hit on Sunday in the Khost area of Harnai, the Dawn newspaper reported. The incident happened two days after 11 miners were killed in a coal mine collapsed in the Sanjdi area near Quetta. Currently, authorities are trying to retrieve the remaining body from the Sanjdi mine. In the latest incident, cracks developed in a coal mine located in the Khost coal field of Harnai district and a portion of the mine caved in when eight workers were still inside. Six of the miners were rescued immediately after the collapse of the mine. *—PTI*

Sri Lanka President to leave for China on 3-day visit

COLOMBO, 13 JAN Sri Lankan President Anura Kumara Dissanayake will leave for China on Monday on a three-day visit at the invitation of President Xi Jinping, his second overseas visit – the first being to India – since assuming office in September last year. During the visit, Dissanayake will hold bilateral talks with President Xi on a range of areas of mutual interest and will also meet Chinese Premier Li Qiang and Chairman of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress of China Zhao Leji. A host of issues, including permitting Chinese 'research vessels' regarded as spy ships by India; Sri Lanka's debt commitments to China, stated to be Colombo's largest creditor, and expansion of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) investments are expected to figure in Dissanayake's talks with Xi. *—PTI*

LA blazes claim 24 lives, winds threaten more fires

US has issued warnings on strong winds that will fuel the fire

LOS ANGELES, 13 JAN

Firefighters are battling to contain wildfires that have devastated the Los Angeles area, killing at least 24 people and destroying thousands of homes. As of Sunday, authorities reported 16 people still missing, and the number is expected to rise. The National Weather Service has issued red flag warnings through Wednesday, forecasting strong winds, with gusts reaching up to 113 km/h. Meteorologists warned that Tuesday would be the most dangerous day due to dry conditions and fierce Santa Ana winds.

Los Angeles County Fire Chief Anthony Marrone said 70 additional water trucks had been deployed to help contain the flames, which have been exacerbated by dry brush and months of little rainfall. The wildfires, which began last week, have ravaged entire neighborhoods, with the Eaton and Palisades Fires accounting for over 160 square kilometers of burned land.

The death toll has reached 24, with 16 fatalities attributed to the Eaton Fire and 8 to the Palisades Fire. Officials warned the number could increase as recovery teams search through leveled neighborhoods. About 150,000 residents remain under evacuation orders, and shelters are housing more than 700 displaced people. Firefighters from California and nine other states, along with personnel from Mexico, are part of the response effort, with over 14,000 firefighters deployed.

Governor Gavin Newsom described the fires as potentially the worst natural disaster in U.S. history. Newsom has also issued an executive order to speed up rebuilding efforts by suspending certain regulations.

In a show of solidarity, nearly 950 incarcerated firefighters have been helping combat the blazes. Meanwhile, federal aid has been activated, with more than 24,000 people already registered for assistance. LA Mayor Karen Bass said she expects President Donald Trump to visit the region soon. *—PTI*

LA fires will be the costliest blaze in the US, having gutted 12,000 structures. The loss is pegged at USD 135 BILLION AND USD 150 BILLION

A car drives past homes and vehicles destroyed by the Palisades Fire at the Pacific Palisades Bowl Mobile Estates ***PHOTO: PTI***

51ST US STATE

Will pay a price: Canada's Jagmeet warns Trump

OTTOWA, 13 JAN

Canadian leader and ex-Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's former ally Jagmeet Singh has warned Donald Trump about his threats related to making Canada the US's 51st state, saying there "will be a price to pay".

Jagmeet Singh, leader of the New Democratic Party (NDP), on X said, "I have a message for Donald Trump. Our country (Canada) is not for sale. Not now, not ever."

He reminded Trump that Canada is helping US amid the Los Angeles fire that has killed at least 24 people so far "Right now, with the forest fires ravaging homes, Canadian firefighters showed up. That is who we are. And we show up and support our neighbours."

Singh said that Canadians are proud people, they are proud of their country and ready to "fight like hell to defend it."

Singh vowed retaliation if the US imposes tariffs on Canada. He said, "If Donald Trump thinks, if you think you can pick a fight with us, there will be a price to pay. I have committed that if Donald Trump imposes tariffs on us, we should respond with retaliatory tariffs in kind. I think that anyone running as Prime Minister should do the same."

Trump has been vocal about his plans to take charge of Canada and make it the 51st US state. "Many Canadians want Canada to become the 51st State," Trump said. Singh's NDP played a critical role in propping up Trudeau's minority government by supporting key legislation. However, their cooperation agreement unraveled in September 2024, as Singh accused Trudeau of failing to address critical issues like affordable housing, healthcare, and the rising cost of living. *—Agencies*

Jagmeet Singh ***PHOTO: PTI***

US, Arab nations make progress in Israel-Hamas ceasefire talks

CAIRO, 13 JAN

US and Arab mediators have reportedly made substantial progress toward securing a ceasefire in the prolonged Israel-Hamas conflict and facilitating the release of numerous hostages held in the Gaza Strip. However, a final agreement remains elusive, according to officials who spoke on the condition of anonymity.

Despite the advancements, several hurdles remain. Over the past year, US officials have claimed they were close to reaching a deal, only for negotiations to stall. A source familiar with the talks indicated that a breakthrough had occurred, with negotiators from both sides returning to their leaders for approval. Mediators from Qatar have intensified pressure on Hamas, while President-elect Donald Trump's envoy, Steve Witkoff, is urging Israeli cooperation.

Discussions are focused on a phased ceasefire, with Hamas demanding an end to hostilities and a complete Israeli withdrawal, while Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu insists on a partial hostage release in exchange for a temporary halt to fighting.

Biden administration officials, including national security adviser Jake Sullivan, expressed cautious optimism about finalising a deal before Trump's inauguration on 20 January.

However, the complexities of hostages and prisoner exchanges complicate the negotiations. *—PTI*

Discussions are focused on a phased ceasefire with Hamas demanding an end to hostilities and a complete Israeli withdrawal ***PHOTO: X***

TRUMP ALLY EYES OUSTER OF 'EVIL & RACIST' MUSK

WASHINGTON DC, 13 JAN

United States President-elect Donald Trump's former adviser Steve Bannon has promised to have Elon Musk "run out" of the White House, in the latest escalation of tensions within the MAGA (Make America Great Again) populist movement.

Calling him "a truly evil guy, a very bad guy", Bannon told Freench newspaper Corriere della Sera that he it his personal mission to take the billionaire businessman down.

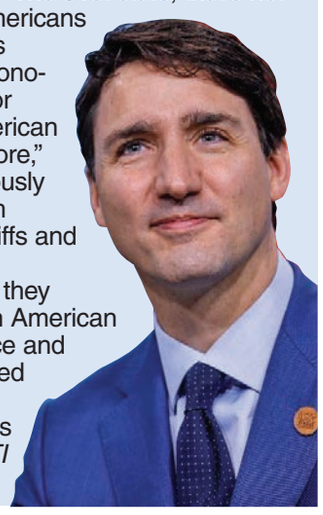
"Before, because he put money in, I was prepared to tolerate it – I'm not prepared to tolerate it any more," he said.

Bannon also said that Musk, a South African-born naturalised US citizen, should "go back" to his place of birth after the billionaire publicly defended the use of the H-1B visa programme to recruit highly-skilled foreign tech workers. *—Agencies*

TRUDEAU CAUTIONS US CITIZENS ON TRUMP'S TARIFFS

VANCOUVER, 13 JAN

Outgoing Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau on Sunday responded to US President-elect Donald Trump's assertion that Canada could become America's "51st state," arguing that such remarks distract from the potential fallout of proposed 25 per cent tariffs on Canadian imports. In an interview with MSNBC, Trudeau asserted, "The 51st state, that's not going to happen," urging Americans to consider the impact tariffs would have on their own economy, including rising prices for electricity and gas. "No American wants to pay 25 per cent more," he added. Trump has previously suggested that merging with Canada would eliminate tariffs and lower taxes. If implemented, Canadian officials indicated they might retaliate with tariffs on American goods, including orange juice and steel products. Trudeau stated that he increased border security spending to address Trump's concerns. *—PTI*



CONGO RECAPTURES TOWNS, FIGHTING INTENSIFIES IN THE EAST

GOMA, 13 JAN

Congolese army forces have successfully recaptured several towns in the North Kivu and South Kivu provinces that had been under the control of armed groups, according to a military spokesperson. This development comes amid ongoing conflicts in the region, where rebel advances continue to pose significant challenges.

Eastern Congo has been embroiled in conflict for decades, with over 100 armed groups competing for control in the mineral-rich area bordering Rwanda. The prolonged turmoil has led to one of the world's largest humanitarian crises, displacing over 7 million people, including 100,000 this year alone.

Recently recovered towns, including Ngungu—strategically located near the provincial capital of Goma—had been held by rebels for months.

However, multiple villages in Masisi remain under rebel control, with Masisi Centre being one of them. *—PTI*

PHOTO: X

Biden reassures families of Taliban-held Americans

WASHINGTON, 13 JAN

As President Joe Biden prepares to leave office, he engaged with the families of three Americans held by the Taliban, emphasising efforts to negotiate their release. The call focused on a potential deal involving Muhammad Rahim, a long-held detainee at Guantanamo Bay, yet uncertainty looms regarding its completion before Biden's departure next week.

Ryan Corbett, abducted by the Taliban in August 2022, and George Glezmann, taken later that year while travelling, along with Afghan American Mahmoud Habibi, remain in Taliban custody. The Taliban denies holding Habibi, complicating negotiations. Biden assured the families that he would not approve a trade for Rahim unless the Taliban releases Habibi, according to Habibi's brother.

Legal representatives for the families expressed gratitude for Biden's commitment but urged decisive action on the deal, acknowledging the high stakes involved. If an agreement is not reached before 20 January, the incoming Trump administration will inherit negotiations, with an uncertain stance on releasing detainees.

Amid these developments, Biden's foreign policy legacy has faced significant challenges, including the US withdrawal from Afghanistan and ongoing conflicts in Ukraine and the Middle East. As his presidency concludes, his administration's strategies and decisions may soon be subject to a different approach under his successor. *—PTI*

US has been negotiating with the Islamic Emirate about a proposal to release Ryan Corbett, George Glezmann and Mahmood Habibi ***PHOTO: X***

- Biden assured the families that he would not approve a trade for Rahim unless the Taliban releases Habibi.

US proposes new rules on exporting AI chips

WASHINGTON DC, 13 JAN

The Biden administration is proposing a new framework for the exporting of the advanced computer chips used to develop artificial intelligence, an attempt to balance national security concerns about the technology with the economic interests of producers and other countries. But the framework proposed Monday also raised concerns of chip industry executives who say the rules would limit access to existing chips used for video games and restrict in 120 countries the chips used for data centres and AI products. Mexico, Portugal, Israel and Switzerland are among the nations that could have limited access. *—PTI*

AHEAD OF TAKEOFF

Jeff Bezos' firm calls off rocket's debut launch

CAPE CANAVERAL, 13 JAN

Blue Origin called off the debut launch of its massive new rocket early Monday because of technical trouble.

The 320-foot (98-meter) New Glenn rocket was supposed to blast off before dawn with a prototype satellite from Florida's Cape Canaveral Space Force Station. But launch controllers had to deal with an unspecified rocket issue in the final minutes of the countdown and ran out of time. Once the countdown clock was halted, they immediately began draining all the fuel from the rocket.

Blue Origin did not immediately set a new launch date, saying the team needed more time to resolve the problem.

The test flight already had been delayed by rough seas that posed a risk to the company's plan to land the first-stage booster on a floating platform in the Atlantic.

New Glenn is named after the first American to orbit Earth, John Glenn. It is five times taller than Blue Origin's New Shepard rocket that carries paying customers to the edge of space from Texas.

Amazon's Jeff Bezos founded the company 25 years ago. He took part in Monday's countdown from Mission Control, located at the rocket factory just outside the gates of NASA's Kennedy Space Center about 80km east of Orlando, Florida.

No matter what happens, Bezos said Sunday evening, "we're going to pick ourselves up and keep going." *—PTI*

The 320ft New Glenn rocket was supposed to blast off before dawn with a prototype satellite from Florida ***PHOTO: PTI***

'China allying with gangs for intelligence on Taiwan'

TAIPEI, 13 JAN

Taiwan's intelligence bureau has unveiled troubling new evidence of collaboration between China's primary spy agency and various criminal enterprises to gather intelligence on Taiwan's defences. This crackdown has led to a significant increase in espionage arrests, with 64 individuals put on trial last year alone, a stark rise from 16 in 2021 and 10 in 2022. Current and retired military personnel are of particular concern, making up nearly half of those charged.

This spike in espionage activities aligns with China's intensified campaign of military intimidation, economic coercion, and "gray area" tactics, including promoting unification online and offering all-expense-paid trips to mainland China for low-ranking officials. The National Security Bureau's report indicates that Chinese agents are utilising Taiwanese criminal networks, including gangs and loan sharks, to facilitate financial transactions for sensitive information. Payment methods include cryptocurrencies and traditional tactics, such as seduction to extract secrets, evidenced by a case involving a one-star general ensnared during his posting in Thailand. *—PTI*

PHOTO: X

Gold maintains rising streak; silver remains flat

NEW DELHI, 13 JAN

Gold prices rallied for a fifth straight session, rising Rs 110 to Rs 80,660 per 10 grams in the national capital on Monday, according to the All India Sarafa Association. The precious metal had settled at Rs 80,550 per 10 grams in the previous session on Friday. In the past five trading sessions, gold prices appreciated Rs 1,660, or 2.1 per cent, to Rs 80,660 per 10 grams. The price of gold of 99.5 per cent purity rose Rs 110 to Rs 80,260 per 10 grams against the previous close of Rs 80,150 per 10 grams on Friday. However, silver traded flat in the second straight session at Rs 93,000 per kg on Monday. Meanwhile, gold contracts for February delivery on the MCX increased Rs 227, or 0.29 per cent, to Rs 78,650 per 10 grams in futures trade on Monday.—*PTI*

PHOTO: X

Land deals hit 2,200 acres in 2024: CBRE

NEW DELHI, 13 JAN

Indian real estate sector saw more land deals in 2024 at over 2,200 acres as developers were looking to expand the business, according to CBRE. Real estate consultant CBRE data showed that land deals of more than 2,200 acres last year as against about 1,900 acres in the preceding year. Out of the total land transactions in 2024, around 2,000 acres were located in the eight major cities -- Delhi-NCR, Bengaluru, Mumbai, Chennai, Pune, Hyderabad, Kolkata and Ahmedabad. Nearly 1,200 acres of land are meant for residential projects, around 580 acres for industrial & warehousing parks and 200 acres for data centres. The report mentioned that Delhi-NCR emerged as the frontrunner, recording almost 40 land deals, out of around 135 in the top eight cities.—*PTI*

IMGC, GIC announce mortgage-backed loans

NEW DELHI, 13 JAN

India Mortgage Guarantee Corporation (IMGC), has announced a partnership with GIC Housing Finance Ltd (GICHFL) to offer innovative mortgage guarantee-backed home loan products. This strategic collaboration aims to introduce innovative mortgage guarantee-backed home loan products to prospective salaried and self-employed home loan customers, specifically designed to enhance accessibility and affordability in the growing housing finance sector, a joint statement said on Monday. By combining IMGC's expertise in mortgage guarantees with GICHFL's extensive network, the partnership will enable it to offer more flexible and secure home loan products to a wider range of borrowers, it said. The housing segment in India has witnessed significant growth in recent years, driven by increased demand and government initiatives. —*PTI*

PE investment in realty up 6% to $2.82B

NEW DELHI, 13 JAN

Private equity investment in Indian real estate rose 6 per cent to USD 2.82 billion during the April-December period of this fiscal, driven by a surge in fund inflow in industrial & logistics parks, according to Anarock. Real estate consultant Anarock data showed that the number of Private Equity (PE) deals dropped to 24 during the first nine months of this fiscal from 30 in the year-ago period. But, the total investment value rose 6 per cent to USD 2.82 billion from USD 2.66 billion in the period under review. Foreign funds contributed 82 per cent to the total PE investments during April-December 2024. —*PTI*

Sensex nosedives over 1,048 pts, Nifty below 23K

3,562 stocks decline fuelled by concerns over slowing earnings

MUMBAI, 13 JAN

Equity benchmark Sensex cracked over 1,000 points to dive below the 77,000 level on Monday, tracking heavy selling in global equities and a spike in international crude prices.

A strong US jobs data erasing early rate cut expectations, the rupee logging its steepest single-day fall in nearly two years and unabated foreign fund outflows also dampened investors' sentiment.

Falling for the fourth straight session, the 30-share BSE benchmark Sensex tanked 1,048.90 points or 1.36 per cent to settle at 76,330.01. During the day, it plunged 1,129.19 points or 1.45 per cent to 76,249.72.

As many as 3,562 stocks declined, while 555 advanced and 131 remained unchanged on the BSE.

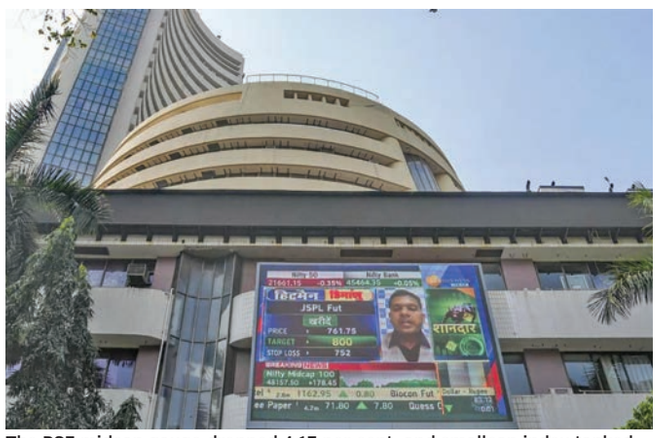
Also, 508 stocks hit their 52-week lows while 120 stocks reached the one-year high level.

The NSE Nifty dropped 345.55 points or 1.47 per cent to close at 23,085.95.

From the 30-share blue-chip pack, Zomato cracked nearly 7 per cent. Power Grid, Adani Ports, Tata Steel, NTPC, Tata Motors, Tech Mahindra, Mahindra & Mahindra, Asian Paints, Sun Pharma and UltraTech Cement were the other major laggards.

In contrast, Axis Bank, Hindustan Unilever, Tata Consultancy Services and IndusInd Bank were the gainers. The BSE midcap gauge dropped 4.17 per cent, and smallcap index tanked 4.14 per cent.

Meanwhile, retail inflation slowed to a four-month low of 5.22 per cent in December against 5.48 pc in November, mainly due to easing of prices in food basket, according to government data released on Monday. The BSE benchmark Sensex declined 241.30 points or 0.31 per cent to settle at 77,378.91 on Friday. —*PTI*



The BSE midcap gauge dropped 4.17 per cent, and smallcap index tanked 4.14 per cent PHOTO: X

- Power Grid, Adani Ports, Tata Steel, NTPC, Tata Motors, Tech Mahindra, , Asian Paints, Sun Pharma and UltraTech Cement were major laggards

GEOPOLITICAL CHALLENGES

India 3rd in fintech funding despite 33% decline in 2024

NEW DELHI, 13 JAN

PHOTO: PTI

India maintained its position as the third-largest recipient of fintech funding globally in 2024, although total funding fell by 33 per cent year-on-year to USD 1.9 billion, according to a report by market intelligence firm Tracxn released on Monday.

The decline in funding, attributed to a general slowdown in demand and geopolitical challenges, marks a significant drop from USD 2.8 billion raised in 2023 and USD 5.6 billion in 2022. Notably, the highest funding of USD 805 million was secured in the third quarter of 2024, representing a 61 per cent increase year-on-year.

The second half of the year accounted for 59 per cent of the total funding, with August being particularly robust, contributing USD 434 million.

Despite the funding slowdown, the Indian fintech ecosystem demonstrated resilience, marked by the emergence of two new unicorns, Money View and Perfios, and a record eight IPOs in the year. Tracxn co-founder Neha Singh expressed optimism, stating that the sector is well-positioned for future growth, emphasizing its commitment to financial inclusion and innovation.

The report indicated a slight drop in mergers and acquisitions, with notable deals including the USD 94.5 million acquisition of PureSoftware by Happiest Minds. Bengaluru remained the primary hub for fintech investment, followed by Mumbai and Delhi. —*PTI*

Stalin launches test drive of electric SUV developed in TN

CHENNAI, 13 JAN

Tamil Nadu Chief Minister MK Stalin officially launched the test drive for Mahindra's latest electric SUVs, the BE 6e and XEV 9e, at an event in the Secretariat on Monday. The vehicles, developed in Tamil Nadu, are priced at Rs 26.9 lakh and Rs 30.5 lakh (ex-showroom) respectively and were initially introduced in November 2024 at Cheyyar and Chengalpattu.

Starting from 14 January, potential buyers will have the opportunity to experience test rides of these innovative models. R. Velusamy, President of Automotive Product Development at Mahindra & Mahindra Ltd. and Joint Managing Director of Mahindra Electric Automobile Limited, remarked, "The BE 6e and XEV 9e are the next Indian icons that will compete on a global scale." He highlighted key features of the SUVs, including inbuilt sensors that prevent collisions and a driver alert system to monitor attention levels on the road.

Both models are equipped with 12 ultrasonic sensors, six cameras, and five radars. The vehicles can charge up to 80 per cent in just 20 minutes and offer a range of up to 500 km on a single charge.

Additionally, customers will benefit from a lifetime warranty on the battery packs, which come in 79 kWh and 59 kWh options.

Stalin graced the event alongside State Industries Minister TRB Rajaa and other officials. Mahindra described the BE 6e as designed for adventurers and achievers, while the XEV 9e promises a luxurious experience characterised by sophistication and elegance. —*PTI*

Starting from 14 January, potential buyers will have the opportunity to experience test rides of these innovative models PHOTO: X

FITCH RATINGS

Steady GDP growth, rate cuts expected in 2025

NEW DELHI, 13 JAN

Fitch Ratings has announced that India's robust GDP growth outlook and enhanced banking sector health are expected to facilitate credit access for corporates in the financial year 2026. While the agency anticipates interest rate cuts in 2025 will further bolster this credit environment, it warns of potential downside risks, particularly from rising energy prices, currency fluctuations, and protectionist trade measures.

In its latest report on 'India Corporates Credit Trends', Fitch stated that despite high capital expenditure (capex) intensity, credit metrics for rated Indian corporates are likely to improve driven by wider EBITDA (Earnings Before Interest, Taxes, Depreciation, and Amortisation) margins. Aggregate sales growth for Fitch-rated corporates is projected to remain modest at 1-2 per cent for FY26, down from a forecast of 1.5 per cent for FY25.

PHOTO: FREE PIK

The ratings agency forecasts a 6.5 per cent GDP growth for India, supported by strong infrastructure spending, which should stimulate demand across various sectors, including cement and petroleum.

However, the oil and gas sector may see a slight decline in sales due to lower prices, offsetting moderate volume growth. Other sectors, such as IT and automotive, are expected to experience mid-single-digit sales growth amid challenging market conditions. —*PTI*

WEWORK RAISES ₹500 CRORE TO CUT DEBT

NEW DELHI, 13 JAN

Coworking major WeWork India on Monday said it has raised Rs 500 crore through rights issue mainly to reduce debt and achieve further growth.

In WeWork India, which is unlisted, realty firm Embassy Group holds a 73 per cent stake, while WeWork Global has a 27 per cent shareholding.

WeWork Global, which is a leading provider of flexible workspace, had in June 2021 invested USD 100 million in WeWork India.

In a statement, Bengaluru-based WeWork India said it has "successfully raised Rs 500 crore via a rights issue."

Embassy Group and WeWork Global have invested Rs 500 crore.

The funds will be utilised for the repayment of the debt, strengthening the company's pathway to being debt-free, and reducing the cost of capital, it added. —*PTI*

Laxmi Dental IPO fully subscribed in minutes on day 1

NEW DELHI, 13 JAN

The initial public offering (IPO) of Laxmi Dental Ltd was fully subscribed within minutes of its launch on Monday, demonstrating robust investor interest. The share sale garnered bids for 14,918,937 shares against the 8,970,371 shares available, resulting in a subscription rate of 1.66 times, according to data from the NSE as of 11.54am.

Retail Individual Investors (RIIs) showed particular enthusiasm, with their portion subscribed 5.35 times, while non-institutional investors accounted for a subscription rate of 2.53 times. Backed by OrbiMed, Laxmi Dental has raised over Rs 314 crore through anchor investors.

The IPO, priced between Rs 407 and Rs 428 per share, is set to close on 15 January. It comprises a fresh issue of equity shares worth up to Rs 138 crore, alongside an offer for sale (OFS) of approximately 1.31 crore shares amounting to Rs 560 crore from promoters Rajesh Vrajlal Khakhar and Sameer Kamlesh Merchant, as well as other shareholders.

The OFS includes share sales by OrbiMed Asia II Mauritius Ltd, a key investor. Currently, promoters hold a 46.56 per cent stake, while public shareholders own 53.44 per cent. Proceeds from the fresh equity issue will be directed towards debt repayment, capital expenditure, investment in subsidiary Bizdent Devices Pvt Ltd, and general purposes. —*PTI*

MUTUAL FUNDS COLLECT ₹1.18 LAKH CR VIA NFOs

NEW DELHI, 13 JAN

Asset management companies launched 239 new fund offerings (NFOs) mobilising Rs 1.18 lakh crore in 2024, with sectoral or thematic equity funds emerging as the top choice of investors, according to a report by Germinate Investor Services Research.

This was higher than 212 NFOs collecting Rs 63,854 crore in 2023 and 228 NFOs garnering Rs 62,187 crore in 2022.

The NFO landscape expanded from 81 offerings in 2020 to 239 in 2024, besides, the funds raised through the space more than doubled from Rs 53,703 crore in 2020.

Usually, NFOs come during a surging market when investor sentiments are high and optimistic. —*PTI*

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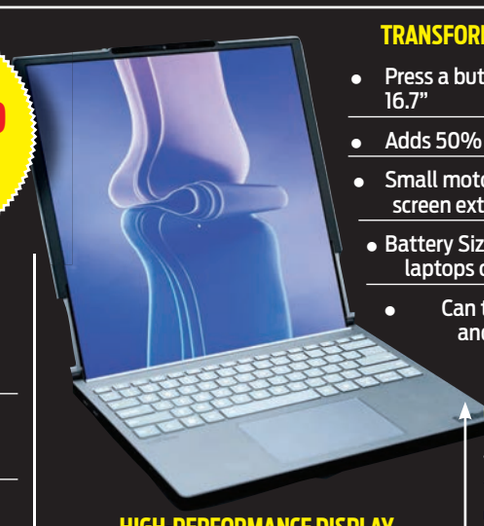

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RISING COMPETITION

Foxconn targets growing EV market

BANGKOK, 13 JAN

New entrants from the technology sector, such as Taiwan's Foxconn, known for manufacturing iPhones, and China's Huawei Technologies, are increasingly asserting their presence in the electric vehicle (EV) industry. This shift has prompted established automakers like Japan's Nissan and Honda to consider strategic alliances to combat rising competition.

Foxconn, formally Hon Hai Precision Industry, is making significant moves within the automotive supply chain, aiming to produce four out of every ten EVs sold worldwide. Over the past decade, it has invested nearly $1.3 billion in automotive acquisitions, including a partnership with Taiwan's Yulon Motor for its Foxtron venture. At the recent Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas, Foxtron unveiled the sleek Model B EV hatchback along with its automotive electronics offerings.

In a bid to bolster their market position, Honda and Nissan announced plans to pursue a merger, a response potentially influenced by Foxconn's intentions regarding Nissan. Reports have emerged linking Nissan's strategy with advancements made by Foxconn, particularly with the latter's established relationships in the automotive sector.

Meanwhile, tech giants such as Huawei and Xiaomi are ramping up their EV operations, leveraging their technological prowess. Huawei is collaborating with Chery Automobile on Luxeed EVs and with JAC Motor to challenge luxury brands.

Despite internal challenges and competition from electric pioneers like Tesla and BYD, Foxconn remains resolute. The company has outlined plans for several models, including the Model T bus and Model E sedan. However, the journey to establish a strong foothold. —*PTI*

Foxconn is making significant moves within the automotive supply chain, aiming to produce 4 out of 10 EVs sold worldwide PHOTO: FOXCONN

Reduce customs duty slabs to 5: GTRI to Govt

NEW DELHI, 13 JAN

The government should simplify the customs duty structure by reducing slabs from over 40 to 5, and ensure that raw materials are taxed lower than finished goods in the forthcoming Budget to cut import bills, boost manufacturing and exports, think tank GTRI said on Monday.

It asked for an inter-ministerial review of tariff policies to refine India's tariff framework, avoid international scrutiny, and align tariffs with national goals.

Suggesting lowering India's average tariff to about 10 per cent, the Global Trade Research Initiative (GTRI) said this can be achieved without major revenue loss.

Currently, 85 per cent of tariff revenue comes from just 10 per cent of tariff lines (or product categories), while 60 per cent of tariff lines contribute less than 3 per cent to the revenue.

It added that India's customs duties, once a significant contributor to government revenue, now account for just 6.4 per cent of the gross tax revenue, compared to corporate tax (26.8 per cent), income tax (29.7 per cent), and GST (27.8 per cent).

The report also suggested ending IGST, cess and Basic Customs duty exemptions under the MOOWR (Manufacture and Other Operations in Warehouse) scheme to support local capital goods manufacturers and Make in India.

Further, the report recommended that the regulatory framework of Customs Cargo Service Providers (needs reforms. —*PTI*

'India vs Pak rivalry': New docuseries set for Netflix release

NEW DELHI, 13 JAN

"The Greatest Rivalry – India vs Pakistan", a documentary series on the cricketing rivalry between India and Pakistan, is set to premiere on Netflix on 7 February, the streaming platform announced on Monday. According to a press release, the series aims to explore "the drama, passion and high-stakes intensity of this rivalry on the home soil of both nations." It is directed by Chandradev Bhagat and Stewart Sugg. "Expect nail-biting finishes, unforgettable sixes, and the kind of drama that keeps you glued to your seat. —*PTI*

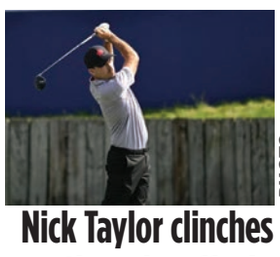

PHOTO: X

Nick Taylor clinches another playoff win at Sony Open

HONOLULU, 13 JAN

Nick Taylor in a playoff is tough to beat. Getting there was hardest part for the Canadian, who delivered another highlight reel of clutch moments in the Sony Open. Down to his last shot, Taylor chipped in from 60 feet for eagle on the par-5 closing hole at Waialae for a 5-under 65 to get into a playoff with Nico Echavarria. He holed a 10-foot birdie putt on the first extra hole. And then he hit a wedge from 46 yards that was close to perfect to set up a 3-foot birdie putt for the win. That was true for so many others, starting with Echavarria, the 30-year-old Chilean who delivered some big moments of his own with a 15-foot par save, a 12-foot birdie, and twice getting up-and-down from the bunker at the end for a 65 to join Taylor at 16-under. —*PTI*

Denmark captain Simon Kjaer retires from soccer

COPENHAGEN, 13 JAN

Former Denmark captain Simon Kjaer formally retired from soccer Monday despite offers to continue playing since he left AC Milan as a free agent last year. Kjaer will perhaps be best remembered as the captain who rushed to Christian Eriksen's aid and then led teammates in shielding him from view on the field after the star playmaker collapsed because of cardiac arrest during a European Championship game in June 2021. Kjaer also consoled Eriksen's partner on the field. Kjaer, along with the Denmark team and medical staff, later won the FIFA Fair Play Award for their actions in Copenhagen. —*PTI*

FC Goa look to continue unbeaten streak against NEUFC

GUWAHATI, 13 JAN

FC Goa will have their task cut out as they look to continue their seven-game unbeaten streak away from home against an equally determined NorthEast United FC in the Indian Super League here on Tuesday. NEUFC have won twice in their last seven home games, and will seek to maintain their strong form against the Gaurs at the Indira Gandhi Athletic Stadium. NorthEast United FC have been in fine run, going unbeaten in their last four league games, scoring nine goals while conceding just three during this stretch. Meanwhile, FC Goa are on a seven-game unbeaten run away from home, matching their longest such streak in the competition's history. NorthEast United FC have won and lost twice each in their last seven home games, drawing the other three matches. Currently, the Gaurs are fourth in the table with 26 points from 14 matches, securing seven victories and five draws. The Highlanders follow them in fifth place, notching 23 points from 15 outings, securing six wins and five draws. —*PTI*

India Open: Consistent Satwik & Chirag aim to win

They will face stiff competition from Liang & Wang Chang

NEW DELHI, 13 JAN

Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty
PHOTO: X

The contingent is the biggest ever but focus would be on a handful of tried-and-tested names, especially the men's doubles team of Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty, when Indian shuttlers go up against a world-class field in the India Open Super 750 tournament beginning here on Tuesday.

Despite the name, Indian success at the tournament hasn't been particularly regular with none from the host nation winning any title in the past two editions.

The 21-strong group that will take the court this week would be desperate to change that statistic and make some amends after an ordinary Olympic campaign six months ago.

The expectations would be especially high from Satwik and Chirag, who claimed the doubles title in 2022, the same year in which the currently erratic Lakshya Sen notched the men's singles top honour.

The tournament will feature 18 of the world's top-20 men's singles players and 14 of the top-20 women's singles shuttlers.

Chirag and Satwik, who are former world number ones, have made a good start to the season by reaching the semifinals of the Malaysia Super 1000 last week.

Despite the Paris Games disappointment, they have emerged as India's most reliable performers over the last two years by regularly making the deep end of the draws.

They would be expected to do the same in the USD 950,000 event to be held at the KD Jadhav Indoor Stadium here.

Satwik and Chirag, semifinalists at the 2024 China Masters, will face Malaysia's Wei Chong Man and Kai Wun Tee in their opening round.

While the Indians have shown impressive form, they will be seeking improvement in quick rallies and service variations in a bid to better their runners-up position in the tournament last year.

However, the Indian pair will face stiff competition from top names such as China's Olympic silver-medallists Liang Weikeng and Wang Chang. —*PTI*

Novak Djokovic's with former rival Andy Murray as his coach at the Australia Open, on Monday
PHOTO: X

Aus Open: Djokovic wins 1st match with Andy as coach

MELBOURNE, 13 JAN

Novak Djokovic's first match with former rival Andy Murray as his coach did not start all that well, even against a 19-year-old making his Grand Slam debut.

Still, after dropping his opening set at the 2025 Australian Open on Monday night to Nishesh Basavareddy, an American who left Stanford University and turned pro last month, Djokovic eventually asserted himself for a 4-6, 6-3, 6-4, 6-2 victory to begin his bid for an 11th championship at Melbourne Park and a record 25th major title overall.

"I'm obviously thrilled to have him in my corner," Djokovic said about Murray. "I must say, it was a little bit of a strange experience to have him at courtside in my box.."

On a busy and warm Day 2, which included nine Grand Slam champions with a combined 43 major trophies in action plus another half-dozen players, the winners included Iga Swiatek, Coco Gauff, Jessica Pegula and Naomi Osaka among the women, and Jannik Sinner and Carlos Alcaraz.. —*PTI*

WARM-UP MATCH

India thrash Scotland by 119 runs in Women's U-19 T20 WC

KUALA LUMPUR, 13 JAN

Defending champions India thrashed Scotland by 119 runs in a warm-up match of the ICC Women's Under-19 T20 World Cup here on Monday.

Invited to bat, India made 164 for 7 in their allotted 20 overs with Kamalini G top-scoring with 32 off 23 balls.

Four Indian batters -- Trisha G (26), Sanika Chalke (17), captain Niki Prasad (25) and Kamalini -- were retired out to give chance to their colleagues to be in the middle in the practice match.

For Scotland, Ammy Baldie was the most successful bowler with 2/13 from 3 overs.

Later, the defending champions bowled Scotland out for a paltry 45 in 18.5 overs for a commanding win.

Shabnam Shakil, Vaishnavi Sharma and Sonam Yadav took two wickets apiece.

In other warm-up matches, Australia mauled hosts Malaysia by 140 runs, the West Indies won against Nepal by nine runs, USA edged New Zealand by 13 runs, Bangladesh defeated Sri Lanka by four wickets, England thrashed Samoa by nine wickets while Pakistan scrapped past Nigeria by 11 runs.

The main tournament starts on Saturday, while India begin their campaign against the West Indies on Sunday.

India had won the last edition -- also inaugural -- held in South Africa in 2023, beating England by seven wickets in the final. —*PTI*

Jamwal defeats Thapa in thrilling men's National Boxing final

BAREILLY, 13 JAN

Himachal Pradesh's Abhinash Jamwal continued his sensational run as he defeated reigning welterweight champion Shiva Thapa in a thrilling semifinal clash at the men's National Boxing Championship here.

Jamwal has been one of the standout performers of the tournament, building momentum with victories over formidable opponents, including 2022 Youth World Champion Vanshaj Kumar earlier in the competition.

Services Sports Control Board (SSCB) extended their dominance with eight of their 10 boxers reaching the finals.

Highlighting SSCB's individual achievements, former World Youth Champion Sachin Siwach delivered a decisive win over Haryana's Gorish Pujani in the lightweight (55-60kg) category.

Lakshya Chahar, another performer in the spotlight, beat Mizoram's Malsawmtluanga in the light heavyweight. —*PTI*

Abhinash Jamwal defeats Shiva Thapa on Monday
PHOTO: X

Australia & SA announce squads for CT 2025

SYDNEY, 13 JAN

Australia and South Africa have announced their squads for the upcoming Champions Trophy. According to the cricket boards of two countries, Australia has named Pat Cummins as captain for next month's Champions Trophy, despite ongoing injury worries for both Cummins and fellow pacer Josh Hazlewood. Cummins has been managing an ankle injury throughout the recent Border-Gavaskar Trophy against India and opted to miss the upcoming Sri Lanka tour to welcome his second child. Chair of Selectors George Bailey indicated they are hopeful about his fitness for the tournament.

Hazlewood, who missed recent Tests due to a calf issue, has also been included in the preliminary 15-player squad. Australia, the reigning ODI world champions, has opted for a balanced team featuring all-rounders such as Mitchell Marsh, who returns after being dropped for the last Test against India.

The Australian squad includes: Pat Cummins (c), Alex Carey, Nathan Ellis, Aaron Hardie, Josh Hazlewood, Travis Head, Josh Inglis, Marnus Labuschagne, Mitchell Marsh, Glenn Maxwell, Matthew Short, Steve Smith, Mitchell Starc, Marcus Stoinis, Adam Zampa.

Meanwhile, South Africa has welcomed back Lungi Ngidi and Anrich Nortje for Temba Bavuma's squad after they recovered from injury. Their 15-player roster includes Kagiso Rabada and Keshav Maharaj, while Gerald Coetzee was omitted due to a groin injury.

South Africa's Champions Trophy squad: Temba Bavuma (c), Tony de Zorzi, Marco Jansen, Heinrich Klaasen, Keshav Maharaj, Aiden Markram, David Miller, Wiaan Mulder, Lungi Ngidi, Anrich Nortje, Kagiso Rabada, Ryan Rickelton, Tabraiz Shamsi, Tristan Stubbs, Rassie van der Dussen. —*PTI*

Man U triumphs over Arsenal in FA Cup penalty shootout

LONDON, 13 JAN

Tottenham endured the humiliation of being taken to extra time by Tamworth in FA Cup
PHOTO: X

Tottenham endured the humiliation of being taken to extra time by Tamworth, an opponent nearly 100 places lower in English soccer's pyramid, before winning 3-0 and avoiding one of the biggest shocks in FA Cup history.

Defending champion Manchester United also advanced from the third round by beating Arsenal 5-3 in a penalty shootout after a 1-1 draw. Joshua Zirkzee converted the clinching penalty for United, which played from the 61st minute with 10 men following Diogo Dalot's sending-off.

Four days after beating Premier League leader Liverpool 1-0 in the English League Cup semifinals, Tottenham's team of established internationals toiled against a group of part-time soccer players whose main jobs included bricklaying, selling zippers and being a financial advisor.

A massive surprise was on when fifth-tier Tamworth forced extra time with the score 0-0, only for the hosts to concede an own-goal in the 101st minute and then strikes by Dejan Kulusevski and Brennan Johnson to disappoint the majority of the 3,700 fans inside the tiny stadium called The Lamb.

Man United's reward for beating Arsenal was a home match in the fourth round against Leicester, which is managed by former United striker Ruud van Nistelrooy. Van Nistelrooy was in temporary charge of United for its win over Leicester in a League Cup match in October.

Liverpool will play second-tier Plymouth away and Manchester City was drawn away to either third-tier Leyton Orient or second-tier Derby. —*PTI*

Barcelona beats Real Madrid 5-2 in Super Cup final

MADRID, 13 JAN

Real Madrid sought revenge in the latest "clasico" against Barcelona but suffered another humiliating defeat, losing 5-2 in the Spanish Super Cup final held in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, on Sunday. This defeat follows a 4-0 loss to Barcelona in a league match in October.

Kylian Mbappé gave Madrid an early lead in his second clasico, but Barcelona quickly took control. Goals from Lamine Yamal, Robert Lewandowski, and Raphinha—who netted two—along with a strike from Alejandro Balde, sealed Madrid's fate. Rodrygo managed a consolation goal in the 60th minute after Barcelona's Wojciech Szczesny was sent off.

Lewandowski, who now has 26 goals in 27 appearances this season, credited the Christmas break for enabling Barcelona to regroup after a rough patch at the end of the previous year. —*PTI*

IN A FIRST

Kho Kho World Cup kicks off in Delhi

NEW DELHI, 13 JAN

PHOTO: KHO KHO FEDERATION

The inaugural Kho Kho World Cup kicked off on Monday at the Indira Gandhi Stadium in New Delhi with a vibrant opening ceremony attended by Minister of Youth Affairs and Sports Mansukh Mandaviya.

Addressing the gathering, Mandaviya expressed pride in hosting the event in India, calling Kho Kho "our sport" and emphasizing its significance in Indian culture and tradition.

He highlighted the sport's growing global reach, with participation from over 50 countries, and shared his efforts to include Kho Kho in the Asian Games and potentially in the Olympics if India hosts the 2036 Games.

Mandaviya extended his best wishes to all players competing in the tournament.

Dignitaries at the event included Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar, IOA President PT Usha, BCCI Vice President Rajeev Shukla, and other notable figures.

India faced Nepal in their opening match, with 20 men's teams and 19 women's teams vying for the championship title.

- Teams are divided into four groups in both categories, featuring countries from across the globe, including Brazil, England, Iran, Kenya, and the USA

Teams are divided into four groups in both categories, featuring countries from across the globe, including Brazil, England, Iran, Kenya, and the USA.

The tournament showcases the international rise of Kho Kho, bringing together nations in a celebration of this traditional Indian sport. —*PTI*

Kapil: Don't compare one cricket gen to another

NEW DELHI, 13 JAN

PHOTO: PTI

It is needless to compare two generations of players and pass a judgement on who was better, legendary cricketer Kapil Dev said on Monday and refused to get into a debate if BCCI selectors were right in excluding Yashasvi Jaiswal and Rishabh Pant from the T20I squad for the five-match series against England.

Kapil bowled nearly 300 overs during the 1991-92 Test series against Australia and in the same rubber he became the first Indian to take 400 wickets in the traditional format apart from contributing with the bat in the team's cause.

India pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah could not bowl in the second innings of the fifth Border-Gavaskar Test recently because of back spasms. India lost the five-match series 1-3. The 31-year-old Bumrah bowled more than 150 overs and emerged the highest wicket-taker on both sides with 32 scalps.

"Please don't compare. You cannot compare one generation with another. That is not required. Today, players are scoring 300 runs in a day. It didn't happen during our time. So don't compare the two (generations)," said Kapil during an event hosted by the Professional Golf Tour of India (PGTI) of which he is the president. —*PTI*